Barcode : 2990100061275
Title - Tribe, Caste and Religion In India
Author - Romesh Thapar
Language - english
Pages - 182
Publication Year - 1977
Barcode EAN.UCC-13
2 990100 061275

Tribe, Caste and Religion in India

EDITED BY
Romesh Thapar

M

© Seminar Publications, 1977

All rights reserved. No part of this
publication may be reproduced or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, without permission

First published 1977 by

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF INDIA LIMITED
Associated companies throughout the world

SBN 33390 196 7

Published by S G Wasani
for The Macmillan Company of India Limited and
printed at Prabhat Press, Meerut

Notes on Contributors

A. Aiyappan, One of India's seniormost anthropologists, now retired; studied tribes and castes in many parts of South India, mainly Kerala and Tamilnadu.

Andre Beteille, Professor of Sociology, University of Delhi, has published several books and articles dealing with the Indian social structure.

Nirmal Kumar Bose, anthropologist and Gandhian, wrote and lectured on a variety of subjects ranging from temple architecture to urban problems in contemporary India; was Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, and, later, Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; died 1972.

A.R. Desai, recently retired as Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology, University of Bombay, noted for his application of the Marxian approach to the study of the Indian social structure.

Verrier Elwin, distinguished anthropologist and writer, came as a missionary from England, but settled down to work among and write about India's tribal people; was influenced by Gandhi and is believed to have influenced Nehru's thinking on tribal India; died 1964.

S. Fuchs, worked among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in many parts of Central India; author of a number of books.

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, distinguished Austrian ethnographer, taught anthropology for three decades in London, and did extensive fieldwork among tribal peoples in various parts of India, as well as in Nepal.

M.K. Haldar, has taught Philosophy in the University of Delhi.

Preface

A good deal of the valuable material on tribe, caste and religion published in the pages of *Seminar*, the monthly symposium, is no longer readily available. This selection is an attempt to meet the demand.

The tribal section is of considerable significance. In the pre-independence period, one notes the development of two divergent approaches to tribal policy, related to two different ways of looking at the position of the tribals in Indian society. One set of people stressed the separate place of the tribals in traditional society, arguing that they were Animists and *not* (or as opposed to) Hindus. They had a separate past, and this separateness must be emphasised in a policy for their future. This may be described as the imperialist position, except that it would be unfair to describe as an imperialist, its main proponent, Verrier Elwin. At any rate, Elwin and Fürer-Haimendorf (who both figure in this issue) stressed the separateness of the tribal people from the Hindus, in terms of religion and other aspects of culture. By contrast, the nationalist point of view as represented by Indians like N.K. Bose (who figures in this issue) and G.S. Ghurye (who does not), argued that no clear line could be drawn between tribal and non-tribal people in either the present or the past. From the anthropological point of view, Bose and Ghurye were right in maintaining that the distinction between 'Hinduism' and 'Animism' was false and misleading. Elwin's name became unfortunately associated with the plea for tribal separation. His article in *Seminar* was important because he used the occasion to dissociate himself from a policy of tribal separatism.

Before independence, three alternative policies were thought of: (i) isolation, (ii) assimilation, and (iii) integration. To Jawaharlal Nehru the policies of isolation and assimilation became

unfeasible after independence. He wanted the tribal people to retain their distinctive identity while becoming more fully integrated into the larger society. The tribal problem is, in this sense, the problem of nation-building in a plural society. But here, unlike as in the case of certain religious minorities, it is not just that they have a distinctive identity which they wish to maintian, but also that their economic position is very weak and insecure.

There are really two sides to the question of caste as a social problem—the problem of community or the 'communal' problem (in the south, 'communal' politics generally meant caste politics) and the problem of inequality. The two problems were inter-linked in the past. They tend to become dissociated from each other today. In the public sphere, particularly in politics, the 'community' aspect of caste tends to be stressed, and alliances are not uncommonly made between castes, or between sections of castes occupying quite different positions in the hierarchy. In the private sphere, in the context of connubium and commensality, traditional considerations of hierarchy are not all that unimportant.

There has been such a preoccupation in recent years with the role of caste in politics. One gets example of caste politics from many parts of the country. There is a kind of theory which tends to suggest that caste politics which is 'traditional' will be replaced by class politics which is 'modern'. This is a little facile. The example of Kerala shows very well the interpenetration of the two kinds of politics.

Caste and religion are sections which overlap. There are two major aspects of religious phenomena which are covered: religious *ideas* and *values* on the one hand, and the interests of religious groups on the other. Several of the essays deal with issues revolving around the protection and promotion of religious interests.

We have here, from a number of distinguished contributors, an analytical commentary on three of the most important aspects of Indian society and culture.

1977 SEMINAR PUBLICATIONS

Contents

Notes on Contributors v

Preface vii

TRIBE

Tribal Problems in India 1
CHRISTOPH VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF

The Definition of Tribe 12
ANDRE BETEILLE

Tribes in Transition 15
A R DESAI

Issues in Tribal Policy Making 29
VERRIER ELWIN

Tribes in the South 38
A AIYAPPAN

Central Indian Tribes 47
STEPHEN FUCHS

India's Eastern Tribes 54
NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE

CASTE

Caste and Social Status 59
ANDRE BETEILLE

Inter-Caste Tensions 66
R N SAKSENA

Caste and Politics 74
V M SIRSIKAR

The Problem of Untouchables 82
B K ROY-BURMAN

Historical Trends 94
S A H HAQQI

Facts and the Future 103
T N MADAN

RELIGION

Hindu Values: Myth and Reality 111
M K HALDAR

Western Impact on Indian Values 121
A K SARAN

Modernisation and Religious Values 130
A N PANDEYA

Caste and Religion in Indian Politics 139
CHETAKAR JHA

The Changing Role of Religious Minorities 145
RASHEEDUDDIN KHAN

Framework of Minority Politics 161
GOPAL KRISHNA

*Tribal Problems in India**

CHRISTOPH VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF

For the past quarter of a century, the Indian aboriginals have been considered a 'problem' for government and their more advanced fellow-citizens. This attitude to the tribal minorities is an altogether new phenomenon in Indian history.

For thousands of years, primitive tribes persisted in forests and hills without having more than casual contacts with the populations of the open plains and the centres of civilisation. Now and then, a military campaign extending for a short spell into the fastness of tribal country would bring the inhabitants temporarily to the notice of Princes and chroniclers, but for long periods there was frictionless 'coexistence' between the tribal folks and Hindu caste society in the truest sense of the word. No doubt there were instances of individuals and small tribal groups being absorbed within the caste system of Hindu India, but such cases of assimilation attracted little attention and did not give rise to any special problems. On the part of Hindu society, there was no conscious drive to assimilate or reform the aboriginals, and the latter seem to have shown little eagerness to exchange their own style of life with that of their Hindu neighbours.

Coexistence was possible because there was on the whole no pressure of population, and the advanced communities did not feel any urge to impose their own values on people placed patently outside the orbit of Hindu civilisation. It is common knowledge that the physical isolation of most of the aboriginal tribes drew to an end when in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, railways and roads were driven into hills and forest areas, and the sudden growth of India's population caused land-hungry Hindu peasants to invade the sparsely populated tribal

*From *Seminar*, (14), October, 1960.

regions of Middle and South India. Moreover, the extension of law and order to areas which in earlier days had been virtually unadministered, enabled traders and money-lenders to establish themselves in aboriginal villages and exploit the tribesman's ignorance of the working of a money economy to their own benefit. There are many regions where within a span of twenty to thirty years, the aboriginals lost their economic independence and most of their land and, in some cases, the ensuing tension and frustration resulted in spontaneous outbreaks of violence and even in organised rebellions.

Today, when political emphasis is placed on the protection of cultivators and the rights of tenants, the alienation of tribal land to newcomers is perhaps no longer as widespread a phenomenon as it used to be. But where aboriginals are backward and ignorant, and population pressure is great, there remains, despite all safeguards, the danger of encroachment on tribal land. Most exposed to this danger are areas where the tribesmen practise shifting cultivation, and rights to the soil are vested in village-communities rather than in individuals. Unfamiliar with the concept of individual ownership and accustomed to the free use of their communal land, aboriginals are often slow to avail themselves of the facilities offered to cultivators under various settlement schemes. Special efforts are, therefore, required to assist the aboriginals in obtaining legal rights to their ancestral tribal land. Except for those who might profit from the alienation of tribal land, no one is likely to quarrel with a policy aimed at safeguarding the aboriginals' right in the land they have occupied for centuries. Controversial to the highest degree, however, is the problem of their future cultural and social development. Contact with more advanced and dynamic populations there will always be. This contact may lead to the rapid disintegration of tribal society and the absorption of the aboriginals within the surrounding population, or it may result in a conscious and self-chosen seclusion.

Outside India, there are enough examples for both possibilities. In New Zealand, the indigenous Maori have achieved virtually complete assimilation, whereas in the United States of America, some of the Pueblo Indians are resisting any encroachment on their cultural identity with iron determination, and have remained Indian in general outlook, social system and ideology even

though they have accepted certain selected elements of modern techniques. The question confronting India's policymakers is then ultimately one of values. Are the aboriginals to be allowed to follow their inclination in accepting or rejecting the cultural and social pattern represented by their Hindu neighbours, or are they to be compelled or coaxed to abandon their own cultural traditions and values?

In the past, Hindu society has been tolerant of groups that would not conform to the standards set by the higher castes. True, such groups were denied equal ritual status, but no efforts were made to deflect them from their chosen style of living. In recent years, this attitude has changed. Perhaps, it is the influence of western belief in universal values and the example of western proselytising zeal which has encouraged a spirit of intolerance *vis-à-vis* cultural and social divergencies. Many are those who cannot enter an aboriginal village without wishing to reform the people's life and way of thinking. Food habits, clothes (or the lack of them), marriage customs and ways of worship may all come in for criticism or ridicule. While it is obvious that such customs as head-hunting cannot be tolerated in any part of a centrally administered modern State, it seems a matter of personal inclination whether one considers polyandry, animal-sacrifices and the brewing of rice-beer good, bad or morally neutral. No doubt, the value system of many aboriginal tribes differs fundamentally from that of orthodox Hindu society, and even those Middle Indian tribes which have adopted certain Hindu beliefs and practise forms of worship akin to Hindu ritual, do not subscribe to Hindu social values.

Paradoxically, many tribal peoples share, on the other hand, certain basic social attitudes with the most progressive sections of Indian urban society. Absence of caste-distinctions, equality of the sexes, preference for adult-marriage, the liberty of divorcees and widows to remarry, and the independence of the nuclear family from any control on the part of a joint family, are only some of the points on which there is agreement between Indian progressive opinion and tribal custom. It is equally paradoxical that in many areas where aboriginals are exposed to the influence of caste Hindus, just those features of Hindu society which modern India is striving to discard are newly introduced among populations to whom they had hitherto been

foreign. Thus, child-marriage, untouchability, dietary taboos and restrictions on the freedom of women are gaining a foothold among the hill and jungle folk at a time when they are losing ground in the larger urban centres. This development is almost inevitable so long as throughout rural India, compliance with the more puritan precepts of Hindu morality remains the principal criterion of social respectability.

A sphere in which the moral concepts of many tribal people are diametrically opposed to Hindu as well as Muslim and Christian ideas is that of the relations between the sexes. Not only the Nagas and many other tribes of the North-East frontier, but also such aboriginals of Middle India as the Bastar Gonds, and nearly all the Himalayan hillmen of Buddhist faith and Bhotia stock consider sexual relations between persons not bound by ties of marriage or religious vows as morally neutral and socially permissible. Contempt or lack of sympathy for this basic attitude to an important sphere of human life on the part of neighbouring populations, government officials or welfare workers, has done much to vitiate the relations between such tribes and other communities. Jawaharlal Nehru has been most outspoken in condemning the imposition of the Hindu way of living on tribal populations reared in other traditions, but his admonitions are not likely to deflect well-meaning reformers from their chosen task of 'civilising' the aboriginals, unless it is more generally recognised that tribal value systems and patterns of living are as worthy of survival as those of the majority community.

India faces in this respect a more difficult problem than any western country, for India is not only a multilingual and multiethnic country, but also multicultural. There is no commonly accepted ideological background comparable to the Christian tradition in European States. The objection to polygamy and polyandry in England or France is not a controversial matter, because all sections of the population, whether religious or not, derive most of their social ideas from the Christian tradition, and hence they do not see anything wrong in the rule that whereas a Muslim visitor from a foreign country may be accompanied by two or three wives, no citizen, whether professing Islam or Christianity or no religion whatsoever, may be married

to more than one woman at the same time.

In India, on the other hand, millions of aboriginals have remained outside the mainstream of Hindu civilisation, and as long as Muslims, Christians and Parsis are free to follow their traditional ways of life, it would seem only fair that the social system of the aboriginals, however distinct from that of the majority community, should also be respected. No doubt, assimilation will occur automatically and inevitably wherever small tribal groups are enclosed within numerically stronger Hindu populations, but in other areas, and particularly all along India's Northern and North-Eastern frontier live vigorous tribal populations which may well follow the path of the American Pueblo Indians and resist assimilation as well as inclusion within the Hindu caste system. Many of those who know these hill-tribes most intimately are confident that if allowed and encouraged to develop on the lines of their traditional culture, the hillmen can make a distinct contribution to the overall pattern of Indian civilisation. Their acute artistic sense is superior to that of many plains' populations, and their uninhibited and spontaneous approach to inter-personal relations contrasts significantly with the more formalised and restrained behaviour pattern of traditional Hindu society. The retention of many basic tribal values and ideas does not impede a changeover to modern techniques and methods of production.

Members of Middle Indian tribes form the greater part of the labour force of the Assamese tea gardens and have furnished large contingents of workers for such industrial enterprises as the steel works at Jamshedpur or the iron-mines of Kolhan. There is no indication that aboriginals adapt themselves to the work in plantations, factories and mines any less easily than other men and women of rural background, and the readjustment of those who decide to return to their old environment and traditional way of life does not seem to meet with any particular difficulties.

Summarising, we may conclude that the 'aboriginal problem', as we know it today, springs less from the existence of different styles of living and social patterns as such, than from a tendency on the part of India's economically and politically dominant populations to impose their own codes of behaviour on their tribal neighbours. And the solution of the problem depends in the long run not so much on elaborate schemes for the economic

betterment of the tribesmen, but on the growth of a spirit of cultural tolerance and the acceptance of tribal value systems as legitimate alternatives to the value system of traditional Hindu society.

*The Definition of Tribe**

ANDRE BETEILLE

There is a tendency among sociologists (I include social anthropologists in this category) to be concerned less with the niceties of definition than with the overtones of the facts which are relevant to their discussion. This is understandable in view of the subject matter with which they deal. The categories which are of importance to the social sciences are much more diversified than they are in the other sciences. It is, therefore, somewhat fruitless to insist upon rigid and clear-cut definitions at the outset. The empirical facts have a perverse way of slipping through, one way or the other. On the other hand, unless one has a certain clarity of concepts, the value of a scientific study is bound to be limited.

The term tribe was taken over by the anthropologist from ordinary usage, and like all such terms it had a variety of meanings. In general, it was applied to people who were considered primitive, lived in backward areas, and did know the use of writing. Sometimes, it was considered synonymous with the term race, which in scientific usage has an entirely different meaning. In the beginning, nobody bothered to give a precise meaning to the term tribe. This did not create very much confusion so long as the groups which were dealt with could be easily located and differentiated from groups of other types. By and large, this was the case in Australia, in Melanesia and in North America, the regions which were first studied by the anthropologists.

In India, and also to a certain extent in Africa, the situation is conspicuously different. In this country, groups which correspond closely to the anthropologist's conception of tribe, have lived in long association with communities of an entirely different type. Except in a few areas, it is very difficult to come across

*From *Seminar* (14), October 1960.

is a self-contained unit and its boundaries demarcate certain limits of interaction in the legal, political, economic, and other spheres. This, of course, does not mean that no interaction takes place across the boundaries of different societies. These, however, are of a separate character. The boundaries of the tribe as a society have been defined politically, linguistically, and culturally by various authors. To take the first point, it is frequently said that the tribe is a society, the members of which have a common government, and share a common territory. The possession of a common government and common territory are closely related, as every government has a territorial frame of reference. The common government sets the frame for legal action within the society, and for political action with other societies. The boundary-maintaining functions of a government are important and deserve consideration. In fact, but for certain difficulties to be pointed out presently, a society might have been defined simply in terms of its political boundaries.

Most societies are characterised by the presence of a government whose form and functions may be objectively ascertained. This, however, is not true of all societies, particularly certain tribal societies. Many people conceive of tribal societies as being in a state of total anarchy. In reality, this is far from the truth, and many tribal societies have well-established systems of government. On the other hand, there are certain tribal societies which do lack government in the ordinary sense of the term. This, however, must not be taken to mean that they exist in a state of anarchy. Such societies which 'lack government' have been studied in some detail in certain parts of Africa. In the language of social anthropology, they are spoken of as having segmentary political systems. Examples of such societies are provided by the Nuer and the Dinka of Sudan, and the Tallensi of the Gold Coast. A paper by Eisenstadt shows that societies of this type have a fairly wide distribution in the world. Now, the peculiar thing about segmentary systems is that there is neither any centralised authority, nor any clearly defined area or group which can be considered as constituting a fixed political unit. The social system is maintained by a balance of powers, and by other institutional mechanisms. In such cases, therefore, the political boundary—which is vague and very relative—cannot be used as a decisive criterion in delineating a tribal society.

We next come to the proposition that a tribe as a society has a linguistic boundary. It has to be pointed out that not all societies possess linguistic boundaries. A nation, for instance, may include several linguistic groups and, conversely, more than one nation may have a single common language. But in the case of simpler societies, it is almost always true that a common mode of speech serves to distinguish one society from another. In fact, the possession of a common dialect is considered by many as a decisive test in demarcating the boundaries of tribal societies.

Finally, we come to the definition of a tribe as a collection of individuals sharing a common culture. This definition has been accepted, either explicitly or implicitly, by a wide range of anthropologists. Kroeber, for instance, writes:

> The conception of a culture and of the tribe as its social correlate, coincides very closely with actual anthropological usage as this has developed through general consensus rather than explicit definition.

It hardly needs to be mentioned that the term culture is not used here to refer to any particular sophisticated or ideally-desired style of living. It is used in its widest anthropological sense to denote those traditional beliefs, arts and practices which an individual acquires as a member of a particular society. Unfortunately, the definition of a tribe in terms of its cultural homogeneity is much more elusive than its definition in terms of the two boundaries previously discussed. Field-workers throughout the world have realised that no iron wall exists where one 'culture' comes to an end and another begins. Commonness of culture is very much a question of degree. It may include in its sway a tribe, a group of tribes, a culture area, or a whole continent, each sharing common cultural traits in varying degrees. Clearly, then, the possession of a 'common culture' can hardly be considered as a primary criterion in demarcating the boundary of a tribe, or of any society for that matter.

Summing up what has been said so far, we may state: the tribe is a society having a clear linguistic boundary and generally a well-defined political boundary. It is within the latter that 'regular determinate ways of acting' are imposed on its members. The tribe also has a cultural boundary, much less well-defined, and

this is the general frame for the mores, the folkways, the formal and informal interactions of these members. This definition agrees fairly well with the usual text-book definition of a tribe.

Now, although the statements made above tell us a good deal about the characteristics of a tribe, they fall short of an adequate definition for one important reason. They do not tell us anything as to the distinctive features of a tribe as a specific type of society. Most of what has been said would apply equally well to societies of an entirely different type, for instance, a nation. We must, therefore, isolate certain additional attributes in terms of which a tribe as a society may be discriminated from other societies. Anthropologists have paid very little attention in their conventional definitions to features which might be considered as distinctive of tribal societies. Perhaps they appeared too obvious to merit serious attention. Some or most of these features have, however, been discussed from time to time by various people. But very little attempt has been made to systematically analyse them. They remain, therefore, as an assortment of unconnected and loosely-defined traits, only a few of which are of fundamental importance. Quite often, one hears the statement that tribal societies are less advanced, that their arts and crafts are of a primitive type. This, of course, does not take us very far. For it merely begs the question as to what constitutes 'primitive', and what is 'more advanced'. Some people are more specific and say that tribal groups practise totemism, animism, or that they are characterised by the presence of clans and sibs. This also is somewhat misleading, since none of these attributes is universal among tribal societies or, for that matter, exclusive to them. The same may by said of the ecological characterisation of tribes. It may be true to say that most of the tribes of present day India live in isolated hills and forests. But in other places and at other times, tribal societies have been known to flourish under all kinds of ecological conditions.

Differences between tribal and more advanced societies are apparent even to the casual observer. It should not be difficult to sum up these differences systematically, although in a very broad and general way. Earlier, anthropologists regarded tribes as not merely societies of a particular type, but societies representing a particular stage of evolution. In the twentieth century, the concept of evolution fell out of fashion. One need not,

however, fear to use it, provided sufficient caution is exercised. The advance societies are then seen to be distinguished from by the presence of certain emergent characters which the latter tribes lack. These emergent characters are, evidently, differentiation and specialisation.

Differentiation and specialisation both exist in tribal societies, but these have a particular character. To begin with, they are based upon such purely biological factors as age, sex and kinship. The sexual division of labour appears to be inherent in the biological nature of man. Some sort of division of functions according to age would appear to be equally inevitable. In addition to these is the specification of roles according to positions in the kinship structure. Finally, one finds a few instances of functional specialisation in terms of particular skills. But these almost always pertain to specific individuals, and not to self-perpetuating groups or classes. The most typical examples are the priest and medicine-man.

Of an entirely different nature are the divisions which exist in the more advanced, non-tribal societies. One of the most important spheres in which these divisions are apparent is in the relations of production. In all historically known forms of society which have grown beyond the tribal stage, there are divisions into social categories based upon the relations of production. Such categories have the further attribute that they tend to be self-perpetuating. In tribal societies, on the other hand, the relations of production are homogenous. Whatever the mode of production followed, whether hunting, gathering, or 'primitive' agriculture, there is no conspicuous separation of social categories on the basis of their differential positions in the system of production. As a corollary to the above, it follows that tribal societies are unstratified. It is also easy to understand that the tribal economy is undeveloped, for where specialisation is absent, this has to be so. Similarly, tribal economy by its very nature is a non-monetised economy. For, in a society based on a domestic economy, where producers are themselves the consumers, the role of money does not exist.

In speaking of tribal societies as being unstratified, one's attention is drawn to another characteristic of tribal societies. A tribe has been described as a kinship group that constitutes a society. It is almost proverbial that members of a

one of the regional languages appears to have been accelerated during the last few decades. As for the culture of tribal peoples, there are too many elements of continuity with the more advanced regional cultures for it to be considered distinctive in a rigid and clearcut way.

If we examine the second part of the definition, it also appears inadequate. We might here leave aside the question of differentiation that had grown up in tribal societies internally, although this too is important. Apart from this, there is the articulation between the tribal economy and the regional or national economy which has been rapidly increasing over the last few decades. Large sections of the tribal population have been entering into the productive system of the country as such. Again, this is not a new development, although the effect of industrialisation has been to give it a new identity, and even a new character. The result of entering into a complex system of production has been to break down the homogenous nature of tribal society. Distinctions on the basis of wealth have begun to appear. Something in the nature of stratification has been observed in most of the larger tribes of Chhota-Nagpur and Central India. Again, it has to be emphasised that this is not an entirely new phenomenon.

In today's India, therefore, tribes which answer to the anthropologist's conception of the ideal type are rarely to be found. What we find are tribes in transition. On the other hand, we are committed by the nature of our policy to regard certain communities as tribal. There is no harm in trying to locate such groups provided we are cautious in our approach, and not too pedantic. If there are no 'real' tribes in India, there are many groups which have been tribes in the recent past, and which still approximate to them in several ways. In India, we cannot have a readymade definition with which one can go into the field and locate a tribe. The greatest emphasis has to be placed on an historical perspective. The process by which tribes have been transformed is an historical process. And only by going into the antecedents of a group can we say with any confidence whether or not it should be considered as a tribe.

*Tribes in Transition**

A R DESAI

The problem of our tribal population has acquired a new significance after Independence. What are these tribes? How do they differ from the non-tribal population? Why have they remained at a tribal stage of social evolution? How did they fare in history? What is their present status and condition? What is their future in the context of the objectives laid down in the Constitution of the Indian Union and the planned economic development inaugurated by the Government of India? All these and a number of other questions have cropped up with acute poignancy during the post-Independence period.

There is another reason which has forced the problems of the tribal population to the forefront. A great awakening has taken place among the tribes. Struggles to improve their conditions have and are being launched by various groups comprising this stratum of the Indian population. The forest satyagrahas of various tribal groups in different parts of India, the revolts of the Warlis, Dublas, Dhodias, the Bhils and others in Western India against their inhuman exploitation by landlords, contractors, money-lenders and petty officials, the organised protests started by the Santals and other tribal groups, the movement to secure Zarland and similar tribal autonomous belts in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and other States of the Indian Union and, finally, the continuous, violent, almost military battles of the Nagas of Assam, either for an autonomous Naga State within the Indian Union or for complete independence for at least fifteen years—these and such other expressions of the awakening of the tribal people have elevated the problems of the tribal population to a new level of acuteness.

Numerous agencies have been attempting to study and solve

*From *Seminar* (14), October 1960.

the problems of the tribal population. The Indian National Congress—as the majority party—has, from the time it framed the Constitution of the Indian Union, adopted various measures to handle the tribal problem. Special clauses have been incorporated in the Constitution for the creation of Scheduled Areas and their intensive development, by granting various tribes an autonomous status for internal administration, such as NEFA (Manipura, Tripura, North Cachar Hills). Further, they are provided with special representation in Parliament, in legislative assemblies, and special privileges in the form of reservation of a certain percentage of posts in government services, and seats in educational institutions.

In addition, the Government has established the special office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to safeguard their interests. It has also framed special welfare schemes exclusively for them with the objective of bringing these tribes on par with the rest of the Indian people.

Christian missionaries and Hindu social reformers have also intensified their efforts to study and reform the conditions of the tribes. Academicians—anthropologists, sociologists and others—have all launched a vigorous drive to study scientifically the situation and problems of the tribal population. Tribal research institutes have also been sponsored to explore methodically and examine the conditions and the problems of the tribal communities. Further, various political parties have been extending their activity to tribal areas. They have created numerous organisations in the tribal areas and even launched various movements to redress the grievances of the tribal population. The 'vocal' educated and richer sections of the tribes in various parts of the country have also started independent organisations of the tribal population to secure concessions which they feel will be beneficial to the tribes.

India, it is claimed, has the largest tribal population of any other country in the world. However, as to the total strength of the tribal population inhabiting India, there exists a wide divergence of assessment among scholars, as well as in the census reports. As Professor Mamoria has pointed out:

> Doubts have been expressed about the reliability of their numbers for two reasons. Firstly, because of the difficulty of

> classification and, secondly, because of deliberate misrepresentations as after 1909, with the inauguration of the separate religious electorates, there had been an increasing pressure on the part of religious groups to swell their number in the census. As a result of these errors, the data on the tribals are most inaccurate of all those gathered by the census.[1]

Without entering into the fascinating history of this controversy over the assessment of the numerical strength of the tribal population, we will presume that the tribal population in India ranges between about twenty millions (as assessed by the 1951 census) and twenty-five millions (as estimated by the Conference of Social Workers and Anthropologists held in 1948). Out of these twenty-five millions, twenty millions, according to these scholars, 'live in the plains and are assimilated with the rest of the people, more or less, and only five millions may be taken as the population residing in the hills'.[2]

Another controversy which is rampant among the scholars, reformers and administrators is regarding an adequate terminology for describing these groups. Risely, Lacey, Elwin, Grigson, Shoobert, Tallents, Sedgwick, Martin, A. V. Thakkar and others have described them as 'aborigines' or 'aboriginals'. Hutton called them primitive tribes. Dr. Ghurye described them as 'so-called aborigines' or 'backward Hindus' and now accepts the designation 'Scheduled Tribes' as formulated in the Constitution of the Indian Union. Some scholars and reformers have described them as Adivasis. Dr. Das and others designated them as 'submerged humanity'. It would be very interesting and thought-provoking to probe into the reasons which prompted various scholars, administrators and reformers to ascribe different designations to the same group. It would open up a new line of inquiry, an inquiry into the different ideologies of those scholars and administrators who were prompted to evolve different designations. That however, would represent a tangential discussion.

The constitution of the Indian Union (Article 366) has defined 'Scheduled Tribes' as

[1]C. B. Mamoria, *Tribal Demography in India*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 1958, pp. 24-5.

[2]Ibid., pp. 26-7.

such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of this Constitution.

Constitution Order 1950 declared 212 tribes located in fourteen States as 'Scheduled Tribes'. It is pertinent to point out that no single criterion has been hitherto adopted to distinguish the tribal from the non-tribal population. Different and even contradictory criteria have been employed by anthropologists, social reformers, government officials, census commissioners and others for this purpose. Ghurye, in his work, *The Scheduled Tribes*, has pointed out how factors like religion or occupation or racial features have proved inadequate when attempting to distinguish the tribal people from the non-tribal population in India.

However, the purest of the tribal groups, which have been resisting acculturation or absorption, possess certain features which can be considered as common features if possessed by all the tribal groups. They are as follows:

> (1) they live away from the civilised world in the most inaccessible parts of both forests and hills; (2) they belong either to one of the three stocks—Negritos, Austroloids, or Mongoloids; (3) they speak the same tribal dialect; (4) they profess a primitive religion known as 'Animism' in which the worship of ghosts and spirits is the most important element; (5) they follow primitive occupations such as gleaning, hunting, and gathering of forest produce; (6) they are largely carnivorous or flesh or meat eaters; (7) they live either naked or semi-naked, using tree barks and leaves for clothing; and (8) they have nomadic habits and a love for drink and dance.[3]

Out of the twenty-five millions described as tribal people, only five millions possess these features.

The tribal population in India belongs to various stages of cultural development. Dr. Elwin divides the tribes into four classes according to their stage of cultural development. Class I is the purest of the pure tribal groups comprising about

[3]Ibid., pp. 21-2.

two or three million persons. Elwin and a large section of missionary reformers and anthropologists grow lyrical over the robust, vibrant and healthy life of these tribal groups. Elwin's panegyric is worth quoting:

> These Highlanders do not merely exist like so many villagers, they really live. Their religion is characteristic and alive; their tribal organisation is unimpaired, their artistic and choreographic traditions are unbroken; their mythology still vitalizes the healthy organisation of tribal life. Geographical conditions have largely protected them from the debasing contacts of the plains. It has been said that the hoot of the motor-horn would sound the knell of the aboriginal tribes.[4]

A section of this category of tribes has been experiencing 'contact with the plains' and consequently has been undergoing change. This group, Class II of Elwin's classification, though retaining their tribal mode of living exhibits the following characteristics in contrast to the first group:

> (a) instead of a communal life, this group live a village life which has become individualistic. Their communal life and traditions, are only preserved through their village dormitories; (b) in contrast to the Class I Tribes, the members of those of Class II do not share things with one another; (c) axe cultivation has ceased to be a way of life for them; (d) the members of these tribes are more contaminated by the life outside. They come in contact with the groups living on the periphery, who live a more complex, viz., civilised life; (e) the members of these tribes are less simple and less honest than the members of the tribes belonging to Class 1.[5]

The tribes belonging to Class III constitute the largest section of the total tribal population, about four-fifths of it, i.e., nearly twenty millions. Members of this class of tribal groups are in a peculiar state of transition. According to some investigations,

[4]Verrier Elwin, *The Aboriginals*, OUP, first edition, 1943, second edition, 1944, p. 8.
[5]Ibid., pp. 8-10.

they are tribals in name but have become 'backward Hindus' constituting a sizeable section of the lower rung of Hindu society; one section is described as Christian. These tribes have been appreciably affected by external contacts. They have been exposed to the influences of economic and socio-cultural forces of Hindu society. They have been also subjected to missionary influences. But, above all, they have been most adversely affected by the economic and political policies of the British which resulted in their being dragged into the orbit of the colonial-capitalist system in India. The members belonging to this category of tribal groups were uprooted from their mode of production in the same way as were millions of cultivators and artisans living in the multitude of autarchic villages of pre-British India from their self-sufficient, self-contained village community setting. During the British period, under the impact of new economic and new politico-administrative measures, these tribesmen lost their moorings from their tribal economy, tribal social organisation, tribal religion and tribal cultural life.

A large section of this population was reduced to the status of bond slaves or agrestic serfs of money-lenders, zamindars and contractors who entered Indian society as a result of the political and economic policies pursued by the British. Another section was reduced to the category of near slave labourers working on plantations, in mines, on railway and road constructions and other enterprises. They were uprooted from their habitat and condemned to a wretched existence. A number of these tribes were branded as criminal tribes, as their members could survive only by methods officially described as criminal: they had lost their lands and their occupations and had no alternative means of subsistence because of the economic and political measures adopted by the British rulers to enhance their colonial economic exploitation.

Yet the vast bulk of the lower strata of tribal society—Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist—are exploited and suffer from the same disabilities as the non-tribals. They have been uprooted from their moorings in the same way as the artisans and peasants were uprooted under the impact of the colonial-capitalist profit-oriented economic and political forces. They are similarly dominated by the new exploiting sections which have emerged. They also suffer, in the same way as people belonging to the

lower castes in the non-tribal population do, from the rigours of laws which have been designed to protect the propertied classes. It is ironic that a distorted perspective has prevented a large numbers of scholars, missionaries, social reformers and administrators from visualising the major, basic and common problems confronting all the exploited strata belonging either to tribal or non-tribal groups; they are not able to locate the common problems in the socio-economic system which was ushered into India.

The Class IV tribals (a very small minority) consist of

> the old aristocracy of the country, represented today by great Bhil and Naga Chieftains, the Gond Rajas, a few Binshevar and Bhuyia landlords, Korku noblemen, wealthy Santal and Uraon leaders and some highly cultured Mundas. They retain the old tribal names and their clan and totem rules and observe elements of tribal religion though they generally adopt the full Hindu faith and live in modern and even European style.[6]

According to Elwin, tribals of this class have won the battle of culture contacts. It means that they have acquired

> aristocratic traditions, economic stability, affluence, outside encouragement, a certain arrogance and self-confidence characteristic alike of ancient families and modern enterprise.[7]

This class of tribals have secured, according to Elwin, the benefits of civilisation, without injury to themselves. Further, Elwin observes:

> The whole aboriginal problem is how to enable the tribesmen of the first and second classes to advance direct into the fourth class without having to suffer the despair and degradation of the third.[8]

[6]Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[7]Ibid., p. 11
[8]Ibid., p. 11.

Anthropologists and workers who met at the Tribal Welfare Committee, under the auspices of the Indian Conference of Social Welfare Work at Calcutta many years ago, suggested the following classifications of the existing tribes:

> (1) tribal communities or those who are still confined to the original forest habitats and follow the old pattern of life;
> (2) semi-tribal communities or those who have more or less settled down in rural areas and have taken to agriculture and allied occupations;
> (3) accultured tribal communities or those who have migrated to urban or semi-urban areas and are engaged in modern industries and vocations and have adopted modern cultural traits; and
> (4) totally assimilated tribals in the Indian population.[9]

Ghurye, in his book *The Scheduled Tribes*, in Chapter II ('Assimilational Stresses and Strains'), has divided the tribes into three classes:

> First, such sections of them as the Raj Gonds and others who have successfully fought the battle, and are recognised as members of fairly high status within Hindu society; second, the large mass that has been partially Hinduised and has come in closer contact with Hindus; and third, the hill sections, which have exhibited the greatest power of resistance to the alien cultures that have pressed upon their border.[10]

Even at the cost of incurring the odium of disproportionate delineation of these varied classification of tribes, it is absolutely essential to emphasise the differences. The problems of the tribal population belonging to various categories are qualitatively different and demand different solutions. Are the pristine primitives living in the forest areas, who constitute nearly two million persons, to be kept in their hilly and forest isolation amidst their semi-starving, semi-clothed, food-gathering or

[9]C. B. Mamoria, op. cit., pp. 22-3.

[10]Dr. G S. Ghurye, *The Scheduled Tribes*, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1959, p. 23.

axe-cultivating stage? Is it objectively possible to keep them isolated, even if desired, in the epoch of railways, motors, electricity, radios, telephones and even aeroplanes? 'If the hoot of the motor horn is sounding the death-knell of tribal existence', can this hoot be muffled? Almost everyone now accepts that such a possibility is not merely utopian but even unreal. Every corner of the land, including the hills and forests, is being enmeshed into the web of a more complex civilised network. If these tribals are to be enmeshed into larger communities, the problems posed are different, the basic one being how to absorb them without subjecting them to exploitation.

Similarly, the vast bulk of tribals who are transformed into agricultural labourers, agrestic serfs and cultivators, and/or further into labourers in mines, factories, railways, plantations and other enterprises, are faced with problems which are qualitatively different from their more primitive brethren. In fact, their problems are identical with those of agricultural labourers, agrestic serfs, bond-slaves, cultivators, craftsmen and workers belonging to the non-tribal population.

> The bare truth is that there is a large section of our population deriving its subsistence from agricultural pursuits, which is exploited in various possible ways by money-lenders, would-be absentee landlords, rackrenters and middlemen.[11]

Their problems are similar and for their solution demand the reconstruction of the existing social order into a new one which will not merely protect both the tribal and non-tribal population from such exploitation, but will also abolish such exploitation.

The classification of tribals into various categories also poses another significant issue, viz., what are the forces which compel the tribals to come under the influence of the non-tribal population living in a higher stage of technological development? If they come under the influence of civilised societies, how are their modes of life modified? Also, what are the forms of cultural contacts between civilised groups and tribal groups? An acute controversy is raging over these

[11]Ibid., p. 207.

problems among various scholars in India. This controversy has gained momentum because it has been claimed that the tribals are aggressively absorbed by Hindu society. As Professor Haimendorf declares, before the nineteenth century there was more or less 'frictionless co-existence between tribal folks and Hindu caste society in the truest sense of the word'. However, from the nineteenth century onwards, as a result of the spread of railways and roads, physical isolation was broken, population growth suddenly increased, land-hungry Hindu peasants and money-lenders and traders penetrated into tribal areas. They exploited them on the one hand and, on the other, compelled or coaxed them into abandoning their own cultural traditions and values.

Haimendorf's statement raises very significant problems. Was Hindu civilisation tolerant, as he says, up to the nineteenth century and only became intolerant later? Is it a fact that tribal assimilation had not been going on or was only marginal during the past thousands of years in India? Studies of the history of Indian civilisation reveal how the growth and the expansion of Hindu society was a prolonged and complex process of assimilation, both forcible and peaceful, of the tribal people into Hindu society. The statement made by Haimendorf unfolds a new field of inquiry. In fact, as history discloses, various methods of tribal assimilation or absorption have been adopted by different societies in different epochs.

Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose in his thought-provoking essay 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption'[12] has indicated how a study of various methods of tribal absorption deserves more careful attention than has been given to it until now. By comparing the Hindu or Brahmanical method of tribal absorption with the Soviet Union's method of tribal acculturation, he has shown how the method of acculturation of tribal populations should be studied in the context of the system of property-relations within which it has been planned to absorb the tribals. The tribal acculturation brought about in a society like the ancient Roman society founded on slavery will be different from that brought about in a feudal society. The mode of tribal acculturation followed in a capitalist society will be different

[12]Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Cultural Anthropology and Essays*, pp. 156-70.

from the above two and also from that of the society which attempts to build up a social order founded on socialist relations.

The mode of acculturation of the tribal people in India before the nineteenth century took place within the matrix of a different social order. After the nineteenth century, it occurred on the basis of a colonial and capitalist matrix. Unfortunately, a large number of missionary reformers, anthropologists and administrators are not inclined to confront this crucial fact. Similarly, our larger number of tribal reformers, administrators, anthropologists who work as consultants to the tribal welfare organisations have still not posed a basic problem. Even after Independence, can the difficulties of the tribal people, as a matter of fact, of all those who are considered submerged, backward and exploited, be resolved within a framework of a social order which is being founded on a mixed economy, functional planning and profit-oriented production for a competitive market?

The study of the classification of the tribal population has also indicated another fact, viz., that even among the tribal population, a peculiar type of stratification has been progressing. On the one hand, a small privileged, property owning, educated section has been emerging; on the other hand, the vast bulk of the tribals are being hurled into the ranks of the lowest toiling, exploited classes of contemporary Indian society. This stratification has crucial significance. The 'vocal', 'richer', 'privileged' minority will inevitably utilise the benefits bestowed on the tribals in the form of special concessions in their game for power. They will launch programmes and movements in the name of the entire tribal people, which in reality serve only their own interests. Further, such programmes and movements may also prevent the unification of the tribal groups with the non-tribal population whose grievances and demands are common. These grievances can be redressed and demands secured only by joint movements of both the tribal and non-tribal population.

The Government of the Indian Union has launched various projects for tribal welfare. Some of them we have mentioned earlier. We will briefly enumerate the principal projects:

1. A number of multipurpose blocks for the tribals for their intensive development.

2. Training-cum-production centres and subsidies for the development of cottage and village industries in tribal areas to provide employment.
3. Colonisation of the tribals (settling of the tribals who are practising shifting cultivation on land) and the introduction of improved methods of shifting cultivation which may bring more yield without doing harm to the soil.
4. Educational facilities—scholarships, free studentships and other educational aids.
5. Establishment of tribal cultural institutes for studying the various cultural problems affecting tribal life.
6. Reservation of posts in government services for the tribals.
7. Enactment of Regulation Acts to counteract exhorbitant rates of interest charged by money-lenders.
8. Establishment of the office of the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to enforce the safeguards provided for the tribals in the Constitution and for the evaluation of various welfare schemes.

The Second Five-Year Plan allocated Rs. 91 crores for the welfare of the backward classes and about Rs. 39 crores for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes. It would be instructive to study the findings of the Reports of the Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes as well as the recently published Report of the Study Team on the Social Welfare of the Backward Classes. (To my knowledge these are the only available official documents regarding this study.) The salient points of these Reports are as follows:

1. The achievements during the First Five-Year Plan cannot be properly assessed because progress during the first two years was meagre and during the subsequent three years they could not be assessed as many State governments had failed to submit progress reports.
2. The benefits of the schemes mostly accrued to the 'vocal section' of the population only.
3. The employment exchanges failed to provide jobs to a large number of educated and uneducated tribes enrolled in the register.
4. The tribal research institutes failed to play a functional role in bringing about the coordination of research with the formulation of welfare planning.

5. The exploitation of the tribals by money-lenders and contractors persisted.
6. The training-cum-production centres were a total failure (in either providing successful training or even functioning as production units) and much money was wasted.
7. The provision of cultivable land and other facilities to settle the tribals was meagre.
8. Red-tapism and lack of coordination among different departments resulted in the lapse of grants and the untimely supply of materials, etc.

The above observations reveal the superficial and uncoordinated nature of the aid provided to the tribal population. Such an approach whets the appetite without satisfying it. It thereby creates acute frustration which is exploited by the 'vocal section' of the tribal population for its sectional interests.

As stated earlier, the problems facing the bulk of the tribal population are basically similar to and bound up with the problems of the vast mass of the exploited and uprooted non-tribal Indian population. As observed in my earlier studies—*Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism* and *Rural Sociology in India*—the problems of the masses including the intensely oppressed tribal population arise from the very character of the social order that is existing and developing further in our country. In fact, their problems will only be aggravated within the existing and functioning capitalist social system. Their solutions can be found only when a non-exploiting social order is established. The problems of the tribal population should not be treated in a superficially symptomatic way. These problems have to be viewed in the context of the present capitalist socio-economic system prevailing in India. The very pressure of the exploiting, competitive, profit-oriented forces of this society will reduce the tribals into objects of capitalist exploitation.

The desperate, violent and militant struggles which are being launched by the tribal population in various areas are revolts directed against the inhuman conditions to which they have been subjected and which are being perpetuated even after Independence. Their fundamental problems are not whether they should be permitted to practise the habits and customs of leaf-dresses, polyandry and polygamy or be allowed to continue their indulgence in drink or, further, that their primitive tribal culture

—including colourful dances should be perpetuated. All these aspects of their life were organically bound up with their tribal mode of subsistence, which is now in the melting pot.

The fundamental problems of the tribal population are economico-political. They are problems such as the security of job, a decent standard of living, easy accessibility to the resources of the civilised life, the acquisition of education which can enable them to decide what customs, what rituals and what aesthetic cultural elements they should retain, eliminate or absorb from their culture and various others. If the prevention of head-hunting practices or human sacrifices (however organic they may be with their tribal life) could be justified on the grounds of natural justice, without raising the issue of relativity of morals, then starvation, exploitation, the lack of clothes and disease should be prevented on the same grounds. The tribal problem is a problem which raises the fundamental issue—the issue of the establishment of a social order founded on equality of opportunities and the elimination of exploitation.

*Issues in Tribal Policy Making**

VERRIER ELWIN

Many of the matters which we once used to debate so eagerly have been put completely out of date as a result of one major circumstance—that the whole of India, including tribal India, will be covered by Community Development Blocks by 1963. This is a decision, this is going to happen, and it is therefore meaningless to discuss whether it is desirable to bring the tribes into the stream of modern civilisation or whether it is good or bad to open up their country. Whether we like it or not, whether they like it or not, they are going to be civilised; their country will be opened up. There is, of course, still plenty to discuss, but such discussions must henceforth concern themselves with the details of programmes: the fundamental policy is settled.

And this policy is right. For the last year (1960) I have been Chairman of a Committee appointed by the Home Ministry to study how these plans can be implemented and my own view is that, in the context of modern India, development in the tribal areas must be more intensive than elsewhere, that special emphasis must be laid on economic programmes and on health, and that very large sums of money must be spent on roads to bring these people out of their isolation and integrate them with the rest of India.

In view of this I had thought that, if there was one subject which could be safely omitted, it was the problem of isolation. But to my surprise I have very recently found myself attacked bitterly by two very different people, Dr. Lohia and Dr. Ghurye, on the grounds that I was advocating this moribund idea. Dr. Lohia,

*From *Seminar* (14), October 1960.

in fact, seems to have developed a positive complex about me. He says, for example that:

> In the name of protecting the culture of the tribals, the Tribal Adviser of Urvasiam, Dr. Elwin, has been performing many disgraceful things. The Tribal Adviser has kept the tribals of Urvasiam aloof from the rest of India and is treating them as domestic cattle. This policy is absolutely shameful, disgraceful and barbaric.

These are hard words and I cannot help thinking that Dr. Lohia is mixing me up with someone else, for as far as I am concerned, I could not agree more with him. He seems to be under the impression that I was responsible for the Inner Line which encloses a number of the hill areas of Assam and cannot be passed without a permit. But the Inner Line was established in 1873, and though I realise that I am now getting on a bit in years, I actually wasn't even born then. The Inner Line, incidentally, was established to prevent British commercial interests from robbing the tribals of their land—was that such a bad thing? And in any case, there is probably no tribal area in the whole of India that is less isolated than Urvasiam today. Dr. G.S. Ghurye, for whom I have the greatest admiration, has also recently attacked me as an isolationist, a no-changer and a revivalist. He has based these rather odd charges on two books of mine—*The Baiga*, published as long ago as 1939 and *The Aboriginals* (first edition 1943, second revised edition 1944). He does not seem to have read anything I have written in the last ten years, with the result that the picture he has given of my views is sixteen, or even twenty-one years out of date: even then he has distorted them. As a professional controversialist, I feel that this is not only unfair, but unwise. There is, of course, nothing wrong in being an isolationist, a no-changer or a revivalist. I just do not happen to be either an isolationist or a no-changer. A revivalist? Yes, certainly, along with most intelligent and artistic people who are trying to revive the beauty of the arts and music of India.

I had not looked at my *Baiga* or my *Aboriginals* for about fifteen years—for after I have published a book I always feel a profound disgust for it—so I took them down from the shelf to

see what I actually had said. Now that I have done so, I don't think there is anything very terrible. In *The Baiga* I advocated some sort of National Park in a 'wild and largely inaccessible' part of the country under the direct control of a Tribes Commissioner. Inside this area, the administration was to allow the tribesmen to live their lives with the 'utmost possible happiness and freedom'. Wide powers were to be given to the old tribal councils and the headmen of the villages would have their old authority established. Non-tribals settling in the area would be required to take out licences. No missionaries of any religion would be permitted to break up tribal life. Everything possible would be done for the progress of the tribals within the area, provided that the quality of tribal life was not impaired, tribal culture was not destroyed and tribal freedom was restored or maintained.

Economic development would be given high priority and if education was introduced, it should be on the lines of what was then called the Wardha Scheme, simplified and adapted to the needs of the tribal people. Fishing and hunting were to be freely permitted. The dictatorship of subordinate officials within the area was to come to an end. My suggestion in *The Baiga* was badly put and I should have realised the unfortunate connotations of the expression 'National Park'. But in 1939 what on earth was one to do? It was not a question of preserving Baiga culture—for the Baigas had very little culture: it was a question of keeping them alive, saving them from oppression and exploitation, giving them a simple form of development.

In actual fact, the Government of India has now appointed a Tribes Commissioner and established tribal welfare departments in several States, as well as Scheduled and Tribal Areas, which in practice are not so very different from what I suggested so long ago. Four years later, I returned to the problem in an Oxford pamphlet called *The Aboriginals*. This was published in 1943, but I was not very satisfied with it and the OUP published a new and revised edition in 1944. In this, I distinguished between the great majority of tribesmen who had been assimilated, to a greater or lesser degree, into the culture of their neighbours, and a minority of small tribal groups scattered in remote and inaccessible hills and forests who presented a different and very difficult problem. Of the majority I wrote:

> The aboriginal problem cannot be considered apart from the general village problem. The great majority of Indian villagers are still illiterate; they are still attached to antiquated and economically injurious social, religious and agricultural habits; they have little medical assistance, meagre educational facilities, bad communications; they are exploited and oppressed just as the aboriginals are. Wiser heads than mine will plan and great political and economic movements will determine the fate of these multitudes. The twenty million semi-civilised aboriginals will have to take their chance with the rest of the population. It is evident that there is little possibility of protecting them, although locally it may often be possible to ameliorate their lot by special treatment. It would, however, be deplorable if yet another minority community which would clamour for special representation, weightage and a percentage of government posts, were to be created. The twenty million aboriginals need what all village India needs—freedom, prosperity, peace, good education, medicine, a new system of agriculture and a fair deal under industrialisation.

There is little of the isolationist or no-changer here: in fact, I seem to have anticipated not only the main policies but some of the detailed programmes of the Community Development movement. On the other hand, I advocated a slightly different course for the minority.

'I suggest (I wrote in 1944) that until the social sciences have come to more definite conclusions about the safeguards necessary for primitive people advancing into civilised life, until there are properly trained workers and teachers of integrity and enterprise, until there is sufficient money to do the job of civilising properly, the five million wilder aboriginals should be left alone and should be given the strictest protection that our governments can afford. This is, I admit, a desperate measure and one that is easily misunderstood and still more easily mis-represented. It is a purely practical measures. It is based on philosophic principle. Least of all does it suggest that the aboriginals are to be kept forever primitive. I only urge that unless we can civilise them properly it is better not to interfere with the small minority of the most primitive hillmen at all. Casual benefits only destroy and

degrade; it needs a lifetime of love and toil to achieve permanent advance.'

'For the great majority of the aboriginals, however, we should press forward with the best schemes of rural reconstruction and education that our wisest brains can devise. For the small minority, who in any case can scarcely be reached, there should be a temporary scheme of protection and isolation. Even for this minority, protection does not mean that nothing is to be done. For them, as for the other aboriginals, there is much that all men and women of goodwill may do immediately.

'We may fight for the three freedoms—freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom from interference. We may see that the aboriginals get a square deal economically. We may see that they are freed from cheats and imposters, from oppressive landlords and money-lenders, from corrupt and rapacious officials. We may see that they get medical aid from doctors with some sense of professional integrity. If there must be schools, we may see that these teach useful crafts like carpentry and agriculture, and not a useless literacy. We may work to raise the prestige and the honour of the aboriginals in the eyes of their neighbours. We may guard them against adventurers who would rob them of their songs, their dances, their festivals, their laughter.

'The essential thing is not to "uplift" them into a social and economic sphere to which they cannot adapt themselves, but to restore to them the liberties of their own countryside.'

Apart from the unfortunate word 'isolation' (which in any case is qualified by the significant adjective 'temporary') there is nothing here which could not have been written by any serious development worker today. As for 'isolation', we must recall the circumstances, towards the end of the Second World War, when this was written. We must remember that at that time there was practically nothing being done for the tribal people and what few attempts were made were hampered by the British Government.

Many social workers were prevented from working in the tribal areas and some went to jail for doing so. When I first began work for the tribes thirty years ago, I was kept under police surveillance for several years. Local officials carried on

active propaganda against my work. I was not allowed to open schools. There were virtually no roads, no hospitals or dispensaries; there was no interest in the development of agriculture and there was no protection against the money-lenders, the landlord, the rapacious merchants, the lawyers' touts or any of the people who then preyed on and impoverished the tribal people.

The policy I advocated in 1944 seemed to me, and to quite a number of other people who had studied and loved the tribes, the only policy under the circumstances of the time, of helping them. But I made it perfectly clear, as anyone who will take the trouble of going through the preceding passage will see, that this plan was only a temporary one and in any case applied only to a small proportion of the weakest and most helpless of the tribal population. But then came Independence and with it a great awakening throughout the country. The tribal people found their place on the map; they became news; new schemes of development were proposed. It quickly became obvious that the rather unsatisfactory programmes of British days were totally unsuitable in free India.

Today, no one would advocate a policy of isolation, although it is as important as ever to give some protection to the tribal people in the transition period during which they must learn to stand on their own feet and become strong enough to resist those who would exploit them. I have made it abundantly clear in articles and books which I have written since Independence, that I am neither an isolationist nor a no-changer, and I think it is rather extraordinary that, writing at the end of 1959, Dr. Ghurye should continue to make this charge against me. In the second edition of my *A Philosophy for NEFA*, I have gone into this at considerable length and I should have thought I have made it sufficiently clear that even in so remote an area as the North-East Frontier, our policy was neither to isolate the tribes or to freeze their culture and way of life as it is.

During the Third Five-Year Plan, we are going to spend large sums of money on the tribal people throughout India and I have been one of those who have advocated spending a great deal more than was originally proposed. You do not keep people as they are or as a picturesque enclave by building roads into the very heart of their territory and by taking up very

widespread schemes of development. We want change. Even in 1939 I wanted change. But what I and those who think with me desire is change for the better and not degradation and decay. Anyone who is interested in seeing what can happen when there is no kind of planning for the development of the tribes and no attempt to grade and adjust progress to their real needs should read the last chapter of Father Stephen Fuchs' book, *The Gond and Bhumia of Eastern Mandla.* He will find that the picture of poverty, degradation and unhappiness is even worse today than the one I painted twenty years ago. Everything, therefore, now depends on how the plans for intensified development of the tribal areas will be put into practice. The first and most important thing is to make these areas accessible. Unless we can bring the tribal people into real touch with India as a whole, they are likely to remain suspicious of our intentions and unwilling to cooperate. We may give them hospitals and schools, cooperative societies and artificial insemination veterinary centres, but they will obviously be useless if the tribal people do not come to them. The integration of the tribals with the non-tribal people of the plains is of fundamental importance, and to ensure this, the non-tribes need education as much as the tribals themselves.

The Prime Minister (Jawaharlal Nehru) has laid down a Panch Shila for tribal development and if the following five principles are observed, we may look forward to progress in the tribal areas with confidence and hope. If, however, they are ignored, there may well be a change for the worse rather than for the better. This is what the Prime Minister has said:

> Development in various ways there has to be, such as communications, medical facilities, education and better agriculture. These avenues of development should, however, be pursued within the broad framework of the following five fundamental principles:
>
> 1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
> 2. Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
> 3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own

people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.

4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
5. We should judge results, not by statistics of the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

The Prime Minister has noted and elaborated these points on a number of occasions, and has spoken on the caution needed in developing the tribal areas. Pointing out the disastrous effect of the 'so-called European civilisation' on tribal peoples in other parts of the world, 'putting to an end their arts and crafts and their simple ways of living', he has declared that 'now to some extent, there is danger of the so-called Indian civilisation having this disastrous effect, if we do not check and apply it in the proper way.'

> We may well succeed in uprooting them from their way of life with its standards and discipline, and give them nothing in its place. We may make them feel ashamed of themselves and their own people and thus they may become thoroughly frustrated and unhappy. They have not got the resilience of human beings accustomed to the shocks of the modern world and so they tend to succumb to them.

We must, therefore, be every careful to see that 'in our well-meant efforts to improve them, we do not do them grievous injury'.

> It is just possible that, in our enthusiasm for doing good, we may overshoot the mark and do evil instead.

> It has often happened in other areas of the world that such contact has been disastrous to the primitive culture and gradually the primitive people thus affected die out.

'I am alarmed', he said again, 'when I see—not only in this country, but in other great countries too—how anxious people are to shape others according to their own image or likeness and to impose on them their particular way of living.'

It is rather pathetic to see a fine old scholar like Dr. Ghurye so laboriously beating a dead horse and acting as if he were a lone crusader for his policy of integration. Everybody believes in integration, nobody believes in isolation. Let us therefore, as intelligent citizens of this year 1960, not waste our time any longer on quarrelling about policies which we have long abandoned or perhaps never even held (certainly not in the form in which they are represented), and get on with the job of ensuring that the tribal people have the same opportunities and the same freedoms that we enjoy ourselves.

*Tribes in the South**

A AIYAPPAN

Some of the most primitive tribes of the world are found in southern India. Among the tribes considered extremely backward in anthropological literature, the Veddahs of Ceylon are the nearest to us, but some of the South Indian tribes such as Aranadans of the Nilambur forests of Kerala are far more primitive than the Veddahs. The Aranadans even now do not know the elements of the most primitive methods of agriculture; they depend for subsistence on roots, tubers and small game.

With the increasing penetration of the plains' people into the jungle areas, a good number of the Aranadans find employment as farm and forest labourers. As late as the last century, these miserable tribesmen did not know how to make a hut and were living in rock shelters. They are less than 200 in number and so low and despised and neglected that it is not possible to think of a more depressed little group in any part of the world. There are half a dozen other tribes in the same taluk who are only slightly better off than the Aranadans. The jungle provides them with food though the quest for tubers is time consuming and not easy, particularly in the rainy season. Contact with the plainsmen has increased their wants. More cloth, tobacco, tea and beedi are now in demand and the craving for rice is also on the increase. The cash to meet these new needs has to be earned by casual labour on the farms in forest valleys, and by collecting and selling barks from which rope is made. Their patrons and employers are chiefly Muslims in the local bazaars who are generally ruthless in their exploitation, but in spite of this, the Aranadans prefer to work for the Muslims. The Hindus treat the Aranadans as very 'impure' and keep them at a distance. The Aranadans are almost omnivorous—they eat even

*From *Seminar* (14), October 1960.

pythons—and the local Hindus look on the food habits of the tribesmen with disgust and horror. Those who are well off have a general tendency in southern India—I do not know if it is so in other parts of the country—to insult the poor and to treat their poverty as though it were a crime. Nothing distresses the Aranadans so much as the insult and ridicule to which they are subjected. Some of the insulting stories have found their way even into official reports prepared by government agents who gather information about the tribes from the local bazaars! In spite of their poverty, they are a pleasant and likeable people. I have enjoyed their friendship and regard them as good as any of our best tribal groups.

Credit goes to L. N. Rao, until recently member of the Servants of India Society, for being the first social worker in India to turn his attention to the Aranadans. With great difficulty, he started a school for the tribesmen at Karulai in the Nilambur taluk of the Calicut district and made arrangements to acquire housing sites for them.

Survivals of the prehistoric stage of a food-gathering economy, as illustrated by the Aranadans, are not confined to Kerala. Sections of the Chenchus of the Andhra State are still ignorant of or averse to agriculture and eke out a living by grubbing for roots and tubers in the same way as the Aranadans; they supplement what is offered by nature by the earnings of casual work for forest contractors and others from the plains. Efforts made by the Madras and Hyderabad Governments some decades ago to settle them in 'colonies' failed miserably, as the plans were ill-conceived and did not take into account the needs of the people. The majority of the tribes of southern India are shifting cultivators. The future of these tribes is left nebulous and uncertain. The Union Home Minister is perhaps the only person in a position of authority who has expressed his sympathy for the thousands whose subsistence and survival are made problematic by the vacillations in government policy towards shifting cultivation. The matter has been discussed threadbare by national and international bodies of experts and the discussions seem endless, but meanwhile the distress of the tribesmen is welling up.

Let me try to give the reader the case history of the situation in the Attapady valley in Kerala inhabited by three tribes, of

whom the Mudugas are best known to me. The Mudugas number about 3,000 and are on the friendliest terms with the other tribes, namely the Irulas and Kurumbas. Until very recently they had only minimal contacts with the people of the plains on the Malabar and Coimbatore sides, as there were no motorable roads to their valley. A few officers of the forest department, rare visitors of the revenue department and the representatives of the landlords who owned a great part of the forests were the only outsiders with whom they dealt. As several miles of good roads were constructed during recent years, and the exploitation of the forest, and the clearing of forest land for wet cultivation and for plantations, etc., gained momentum, the tribesmen were exposed to the full blast of the forces of change. All along the roads can now be seen the settlements of the plainsmen, small traders and agents of planters and labourers from the plains, who outnumber the tribesmen. Missionaries and tractors, WHO teams of malariologists and anthropologists, make the Attapady scene typically modern. The new facility of transport enables the tribesmen in their turn to see towns and learn urban ways.

Kumri (slash-and-burn) cultivation of the hill slopes is the basis of the subsistence economy of the Mudugas. Until a few years ago, there was little restriction on the area of the jungle which they could clear and cultivate, and so the tribesmen had a fair degree of economic security. But now both government and the private owners of the forests have imposed very severe restrictions on the Mudugas' traditional right to clear and cultivate the hill slopes. The area allotted for cultivation is now strictly limited and instead of remaining fallow for future *kumri*, the cleared plots are being planted by government and the private landlords with economically important timber or fruit trees. Private landlords seem to be exploiting the needs of the tribesmen; they get the scrub jungle cleared for their plantations in the cheapest possible manner. No one has raised the question of the tribesmen's right to the soil on which they have been living for years and whether it can be so unceremoniously alienated.

What is the kind of future that awaits our children? That was the question which a tribal friend of mine asked me, his eyes moist with tears. The average Muduga is now a highly

frustrated person; he has begun to hate the roads which he thinks have brought them all these troubles. At the time of my visit (1955), the valley was under the Madras Government. The tribesmen told me that they had heard of a government department which was supposed to look after their interests, but none of them had seen any representative of that department. They had grown cynical about visiting government officials who promised sympathy which was never translated into action. The M. L. A. for whom they voted, and who in turn promised to do many things for them, did not bother to visit them.

Till December 1959, anyone who had anything to do with the Attapady valley exploited the Mudugas, and no one, not even the Government of Madras, did a thing for their welfare. However, a pilot project for tribal welfare was inaugurated in December 1959, for the tribes of the Attapady valley by the Government of Kerala. The two things for which the Mudugas in their frustration crave are land and schools. The tribesmen here, with so much of unused land about them, are now among those thousands who are described as landless and land-hungry. I can understand their craving for land, but it was not clear to me why they hankered after schools. They seem vaguely to realise the need for literate leadership.

Some of the tribes of southern India, now lying low and docile, were once spirited fighters for freedom from oppression. The Konds, one of the major tribes of southern Orissa and northern Andhra, the Konda Doras who followed the lead of the revolutionary Sitaram Raju and waged war against the British, the Kurichiyas of Wynad who under the Rajah of Kottayam fought with great heroism against the East India Company, were all heroes in their own way.

In spite of the Goverment's safeguards for the tribes, the half-hearted manner in which State policies were executed made it possible for money-lenders and traders (with the connivance of petty officials) to make life miserable for the tribesmen. In the Agency areas of Andhra, tribal riots or *fituris* were the only way of inviting the attention of the Government to the existence of oppression. But the Government had only one way of reacting to a riot and that was shooting down the troublesome tribesmen. The last riot in the Agencies of Andhra was the *fituri* under Sitaram Raju which took place about four decades ago. The

story goes that the tribesmen's grievances were directed against a very corrupt and troublesome tahsildar who was making roads by forced tribal labour. The tribesmen were accustomed to work without wages for the local zamindars, but the latter were considerate. They demanded only a small number of workers and if a man had urgent work of his own, he was allowed to absent himself. The tahsildar in question knew no mercy; the tribesmen found the situation intolerable and rose in revolt, but the *fituri* was put down and hundreds of tribesmen and their leader were killed. Tearfully, our old Konda Dora guide showed us the place where Sitaram Raju was shot dead. The lands of several tribesmen who participated in the riot were confiscated by the British Government. After Independence, several of them appealed that their confiscated lands be restored to them, but it is doubtful if anything has yet been done in the matter.

The Kurichiya tribesmen of Kerala, who were land-owning farmers, practising both dry and wet cultivation, have during the last hundred years been reduced to the position of tenants-at-will (in most cases, of their creditors). Many of them had their lands confiscated by the Government for the crime of participating in a riot against payment of revenue in cash. Several others lost their holdings by the manipulation of revenue officials. A Kurichiya family-head told me that his ancestors lost a whole hill slope and the valley below for the simple reason that they could not deposit a small sum of money demanded by the surveyors. Others, of course, were ready to acquire the land they lost! This hill slope is now a fine tea plantation. If it were possible to gather correct information about land dealings in tribal areas, the story would not make pleasant reading. I have yet to see a government agency in southern India which is interested in restoring land to the tribesmen.

In the State of Orissa, one of the tribes started satyagraha to get back its land. The struggle was partly successful because the Government was sympathetic and fortunate to have some officials who carried out its wishes, administering the laws in the spirit in which those laws were made. In the southern States, the tribes are so disorganised, and the land-hungry and predatory plainsmen so strongly pitted against them, that the feeble government measures for the protection of tribal interests have

all proved infructuous. The point I wish to make is that government have been responsible, directly or indirectly, for the economic malaise that afflicts the tribesmen. They have failed to give the minority—the weakest of our minorities—the protection it deserves from exploitation by the stronger members of the majority communities.

Frustration and a feeling of inadequacy seem to make members of the small tribal communities in the South suffer from a severe inferiority complex. I have seen bold heroes of the jungle who, for sport, net and spear tigers, quake with fear in the presence of revenue inspectors! The threat of imprisonment is enough to shatter the resistance of any tisbesman. I know of cases where, to escape from the clutches of the police, tribesmen have sold all their belongings. Plainsmen, often unconsciously, make use of any means at their disposal to denigrate the tribes. The schoolbooks which our children study still continue to spread the stupid idea that the tribesmen are racially different and inferior. The anthropologist has made it clear that no racial line separates the jungle-dwellers from the rest of the Indian community, that they are Indians who have chosen somewhat different ways of life and have failed to make adjustments as readily as others more exposed to change. But the gap between the writers of schoolbooks and the scientists is still very wide in southern India. It is high time that something was done to remove the race prejudice against the tribesmen from the mind of the public.

While discussing their problems, I asked a Paniya—Paniyas are a large tribe of former serfs in the Wynad Taluk of Malabar district—why he did not send his children to school. His reply was: 'Can washing transform a cow into a crane?' He seemed to be convinced that he and his people were created dull and no amount of education was going to be of use to them. The first tribal M.L.A. representing the tribes of the Wynad area was a Paniya.

While pessimism and depression comprise the lot of the majority of the tribes, I should not fail to mention a small number of tribes like the Todas who feel they are the best in the world and refuse to regard anyone as their equal! The Todas were the lords of the Nilgiris once upon a time, and still live in the hope that the Government of Madras will honour an old

agreement and restore to them the Toda Patta land.

The Government of India is quite clear that its objective is to integrate the tribal people with the rest of the Indian community. Funds, which according to pre-Independence standards, would seem ample have been earmarked for various programmes to help the tribes to reach the level of the rest of our people. To speed up this transformation, internal leadership or, in its absence, outside leadership in which the tribesmen have trust, should be present. Unfortunately, the small scattered tribes have no leadership worth the name. There are men of character and capacity among them, but they are illiterate. Missionaries have begun work among some of them, for example, among the Todas, among the Irulas and also among the Kurichiyas.

The larger tribes of Andhra Pradesh have some leaders, but they are detribalised and 'sanskritised', caring more for the personal advantages of being a tribal than for the welfare of their fellow tribesmen. Missionaries have been doing very useful work in the Andhra tribal areas for some decades. They give some protection and security to the tribal convert. In the context of helplessness of the tribes against exploitation, Christianity plus missionary protection seem to be far more satisfactory than tribal culture and religion minus subsistence. The missionary fills a vacuum in the tribal areas and until some better agencies go and do better work than the missionary, anti-missionary talk is just hollow nonsense. It is strange that Hindu ethnocentrism would not allow missionaries to organise welfare work among the tribes in some States, while the Hindu leaders of these and other States are eager to send their own children to schools run by the missionaries and would also have them feed the patients in the large hospitals (as in Madras)!

Most of the tribal welfare work now done in the southern States is through official agencies. Any welfare in a poor country is difficult, as the needy are many and resources inadequate. Still, the leaders in New Delhi are lamenting that the funds allotted are not being spent. The district welfare officers in the tribal areas are as good as any other class of officers, but the tribesmen's capacity and readiness to accept the innovations presented to them by the welfare officers are less than those of the rural peasant. Unless government procedures are simplified, work in tribal areas will continue to be difficult and slow.

The difficulties can be illustrated from the working of the Andhra Scheduled Tribes Co-operative Finance and Development Corporation started in 1956-57 as a large cooperative organisation for credit, sale and purchasing, all combined. Though well conceived and good in intention, the Corporation is poorly staffed and works without adequate consideration for the tribesmen. I am told that the money-lender is still able to do good business keeping the tribesmen away from the Corporation because he deals with them at a personal level and has no confounding forms and procedures. Unless procedures are simplified and the money-lenders banned from tribal areas, the Corporation is bound not to succeed. Government welfare work is almost like unorganised charity. Instead of creating organisations which would generate their own momentum, the government make a well here, a few houses there, and a few hostels and offer a few scholarships for students. This is just charity. It is of course, better than doing nothing, but it is no substitute for new institutions essential in the new and changing set up.

We should send out a band of enthusiastic men and women into the tribal areas, young people who will have Schweitzer and Thakkar Bapa as their ideals. They should identify themselves with the tribes and rouse them to directed activity to rebuild their economy and culture. The speech of the Prime Minister at the Tribal Conference in Delhi, in June 1952, is almost a Magna Carta of the Indian tribes, but the unfortunate thing is that the personnel to work out his policy has not yet come into being.

At government level, something in this direction can be done by creating a special cadre of government officials trained for social work among the tribes. They will provide the on-the-spot leadership which the tribal groups require to run their cooperative and other types of new group activities. Welfare work in the tribal areas in the South has to be reorganised, but the key to the problem is personnel. Men are available but they will have to be hand-picked. The State governments are spending a lot of money organising cooperative societies, opening schools and settling some tribal families in colonies, but the tempo of the work and its impact are so slight that one's hopes, raised to a high pitch by the framers of our Constitution and our planners, are being dashed to the ground. Several friends of the tribes

share this feeling with me. It is not mere evaluation that is now wanted (though it is desirable and should be done by a non-governmental body of evaluators), but rethinking and replanning.

In their statements on the general implications of tribal welfare, the Planning Commission has very wisely suggested that the administrator, the specialist, the social worker and the anthroplogist should pool their experience and resources in approaching the problems of the tribes. In all the four southern States, anthropological work is conspicuous by its absence. The Union Government has been pressing these States for long to start tribal research institutes, but no action has yet been taken. The excuse in one State is that its tribal population is small, as though scientific information about a small tribe is likely to be less interesting than that about a large tribe. Numbers seem to be very important. An angry officer asked me: 'Why should I bother about the health of 600 miserable Todas? I am concerned about the health of millions of others.' If the State governments themselves are not keenly interested in the progress and welfare of the tribes, it is too much to expect their officers to show interest.

One, therefore, takes the neglect of research on tribal problems as an indication of the lack of interest of the four southern State governments in their tribes. If further proof is wanted, one has only to go through the report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, a good part of which is devoted to a lament over things that ought to but in fact have not been done by the State governments. They do not even send the Commissioner reports in time or hold meetings of the tribal advisory councils 'for want of business'.

*Central Indian Tribes**

STEPHEN FUCHS

The aboriginals of Central India are spread in loosely connected groups all over the central belt of the Indian peninsula, from Gujarat across Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa to West Bengal. They form the largest party of the aboriginal population of India. Their main strength is concentrated in the adjoining corners of four States—Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Bombay-Vidarbha.

The most important tribes of this area are the Gond (over 3,000,000), Oran (over 1,000,000), Munda (650,000), Kharia (150,000), Kawar (almost 300,000), Savara (650,000) and Khond (750,000). In the west of Central India live the Korku (nearly 200,000), Bhil (2,200,000), Bhilala (250,000) and Meo-Mina (800,000), while in the northern-eastern region we find the Santal (2,500,000) and Ho (over 500,000). Interspersed between these main tribes live about 200 smaller and less important tribes.

It can be safely stated that by tradition and choice all the main aboriginal tribes are agriculturists. Even those among them who follow another occupation pursue it only to buy ultimately a plot of land and to end their life as farmers. In the past, all these tribes used to supplement their food supply by hunting wild growing vegetables and fruits. Their traditional method of cultivation is the wasteful and superficial shifting cultivation (burning the jungle and sowing the seed in the ashes). To increase the land revenue, the former British Government, as well as the native rulers, invited many non-tribal farmers into the jungle areas. They had no qualms of conscience regarding the deprivation of the original tribal settlers' land. These tribal settlers often played into the hands of their land-hungry competitors by their half-nomadic and unstable manner of life, by their

*From Seminar [illegible] October 1960.

primitive and indifferent methods of cultivation, by their easy-going habits, their lack of foresight and thrift, excessive drinking, and by their borrowing of money at high interest, etc.

In areas where tribal land-owners are not protected by special government legislation, this process of land dispossession is still going on. Slowly, but inexorably, are the tribals squeezed out of their land holdings and reduced to the status of field servants and daily labourers, or forced to emigrate to the tea gardens of Assam or to seek employment in the industrial centres, usually in the lowest grades of unskilled labour. Even more deplorable is the lot of the nomadic hunters and food collectors whose hunting grounds are daily getting more restricted so that they are reduced to eking out an increasingly precarious subsistence.

The Government of India is making strenuous efforts to alleviate the hard lot of the tribal population. In 1958, about 750 million rupees were set aside for this purpose, though eventually not even half of this amount was spent. Still, schemes of irrigation, of reclaiming waste lands are inaugurated, assistance for the purchase of live stock, fertilisers, seeds, implements, etc., is provided and cattle breeding and poultry farming are introduced. Roads are built, loans given, free housing sites granted, dispensaries opened and mobile health units sent to tour the aboriginal areas. Legislation extends relief for indebtedness, bondage and land tenancy.

Hand in hand with this economic assistance goes a generous planning for the education of the aborigines. It has been recognised that mere school education is not sufficient. The tribals need as much social and community education. The adult tribals, above all, must be actively associated with the formulation and solution of their own problems. The Government maintains several tribal research centres (at Ranchi and Chhindwara, for instance) to study the aboriginal problems scientifically and to advise the officials and social workers expertly. The Government also employs a host of social workers and development officers while semi-official and private agencies too are active in tribal welfare work. Most prominent among these is the Bharatiya Adim Jati Sevak Sangh, the strongest semi-official body with branches all over India; it is so powerful that it gets a lion's share of the funds earmarked for the uplift of the tribals.

However, all these schemes fail regarding one important point:

the social workers and development officers have not been able to gain the full confidence and active cooperation of the aboriginals. One reason is that they belong to the very people whom the aboriginals hold responsible for their economic and social plight. They also often show little understanding of tribal mentality and frequently express openly their feeling of superiority and their contempt for the primitives. Moreover, government and private agencies have largely failed to train leaders among the tribals themselves and have enlisted too exclusively the help of outsiders.

As for school education, much has been done to promote literacy. But on the whole, the educational facilities for tribal children are still woefully insufficient. Above all, too little is being done to provide a higher education to the more talented tribals and to train an elite. Complaints are also heard that private agencies active in the educational field frequently pursue their own communal interests to the detriment of the tribals. But the schools managed by the Christian Missions seem to flourish, with the result that the tribals who have been converted to Christianity have a higher rate of literacy. They have also the greatest number of high-school and college students. Under the Five Year Plans, increased educational facilities are provided for tribal children by way of scholarships, free tuition, books, etc., and even by way of clothing and mid-day meals.

Social status is an important factor for establishing the mental equilibrium of the individual as well as of a whole social group. Social prestige is a powerful stimulant for human ambition and drive. This axiom holds good also for the aboriginals of Central India. In the past, they have been living apart, and keeping to themselves. But gradually they come into ever closer contact with the non-tribal population of India, which is predominantly Hindu. The aboriginals are thus necessarily drawn into the still all-compelling Hindu caste system.

The tribes of Central India react differently to this social adjustment. Some tribes, like the Bhil and Gond, Bhilala and Meo-Mina, have decided to adopt Hinduism and aspire to the social rank of Kshatriyas (Rajputs). They, therefore, observe the social rules and taboos of the high-caste Hindus with anxious correctness and avoid any lapse that could create the slightest suspicion of unorthodoxy. We may see in this a retrogressive

step, as the tribals are adopting a way of living which the better-class Hindu population is just outgrowing. It leads also to tribal disintegration. Since not all the members of a tribe can live up to the required standard of behaviour, we find in the tribes of this category two sections, a Hinduised 'upper' section and a lower tribal section. Examples of such a dichotomy can be noticed among the Gond (Raj-Gond and Jungli-Gond), Korku (Muasi and Paharia), Bhilala (Bara Bhilala and Barela). Raj-Banshi and others.

Another group of tribes has also accepted the Hindu way of living with its set code of caste rules and taboos. But due to a lax observance of these rules (especially the food taboos on beef and pork), Hindu society has relegated them to the status of outcastes and untouchables. Tribes belonging to this category are, among others, the Nahal, Agaria, Kol, Pardhan, Ojha, Nagarchi, Ganra and Panka. Certain small tribes still absolutely reject any large-scale acculturation and in their extreme conservatism and attachment to their old ways of living will rather die out than change their form of culture. Such tribes are the Baiga, Korwa, Birhor, Juang and a number of other small hunting tribes. They are still outside the Hindu caste system and want nothing more than to be left alone. A fourth and perhaps most important group is formed by those tribes who live in more compact and numerically strong communities. They have developed some degree of tribal consciousness, and meet non-tribals on a more or less equal footing. They refuse to be completely absorbed by non-tribal culture and society. In Central India, the tribes of Chhota-Nagpur belong to this group.

It is a curious fact that the aborigines of Central India have never developed a strong tribal solidarity. Even such important tribes as the Bhil and the Gond have no organisation comprising all members of the tribe, but live in small groups uniting only a small number of village communities in a certain area. The Bhil tribe especially is broken up into many unconnected sub-groups which are partly mixed with non-tribal communities.

This absence of tribal solidarity is certainly one of the main reasons why the tribals of Central India, in spite of their numerical strength in certain districts, are politically so powerless. Other reasons are doubtlessly the general backwardness of the tribals, their lack of education, their indifference to larger

political issues and to affairs beyond their immediate concern. Unfortunately, even those few tribal representatives who have succeeded in getting themselves elected to the legislative assemblies and to Parliament are often either alienated from tribal culture and have adopted a strongly non-tribal outlook and mode of living (graduates, landlords, local chiefs), or are so inarticulate and inexperienced in their new strange surroundings that they cannot play an effective part in political life. It is a wonder that such representatives are hardly able, or scarcely try, to defend the interests of their tribal co-patriots on the political platform.

Only in Chhota-Nagpur do we find some degree of tribal consciousness and the existence of a tribal leadership. But the tribal leaders there have raised the demand for a separate State in which they would be left to themselves, could rule and govern themselves and be rid forever of any interference by non-tribals. Their motives for this demand are clear: a nostalgic desire to return to a happy past, aversion to outsiders exploiting them and interfering with their traditional way of living and a desire to determine their own future.

Unfortunately, the Jharkhand Movement, as this propaganda is called, will always remain an unrealistic dream. The present political rulers of India view it with alarm and reject it as anti-national. Moreover, the part of India where the tribals want to establish their own State is of paramount importance for the industrial progress of India. It is rich in coal and iron ore, and at least two of the giant steel factories (at Rourkela and Bhilai) have been built there. Other huge factories, dams and hydro-electric projects are planned in the same area. These most important industrial concerns would fit badly into a tribal State; they would on the contrary attract a large influx of non-tribal labourers and naturally shatter the isolation of the tribal population, as the latter forms itself into a welcome labour potential for these industries.

In the general breakdown of all their traditional values and principles, the aboriginals of Central India find their ancient religion and world outlook inadequate. While in the past their religion formed the basis of their mental equilibrium and gave them inspiration for their daily life and behaviour, this is no more so. Their old religion cannot give a satisfactory answer to the many new problems and difficulties that beset them.

Therefore, they are on the look-out for a new and adequate religion. The Hindu religion certainly presents itself as the most attractive choice. And Hinduism can muster a formidable force of, mostly informal, missionaries among the tribals. Not only Hindu neighbours, also employers, traders, money-lenders, and in particular social workers and the many government servants act as propagators of the Hindu religion. No wonder, therefore, that out of the twenty-five million tribals recorded in 1941, six to seven million have been dropped in the last census of 1951. This means that a quarter of the whole tribal population has been fully assimilated by Hinduism. And of the nineteen million tribals left, only one and a half million are officially recorded as still confessing a tribal religion; if we deduct the number of tribal Christians, which amounts to only about a million, all the others must have embraced the Hindu religion.

In Chhota-Nagpur, however, where tribal consciousness was more alive and the aversion to non-tribal (Hindu) interference most articulate, large groups of tribals turned to Christianity. Christian missionary activity began in Chhota-Nagpur about eighty years ago, just at a time when exploitation and oppression were most keenly felt, and it appeared in impressive strength. Thus, in the course of the past eighty years, about one million Oraons, Mundas and Kharias were converted to Christianity. But nowhere else in Central India could the Christian religion compete with Hinduism. The number of Christian converts among the other tribes has always remained insignificant. In spite of occasional alarms raised by militant Hindu agencies, there are at present no mass conversions to Christianity, nor are they likely to take place in future. If we may speak of religious mass conversions, they are to Hinduism alone.

It needs no gift of prophecy to foretell that aboriginal life and culture is doomed to disappear from India in the near future. The disappearance of the aboriginal values and virtues and many picturesque customs must be deplored; but an overpopulated India cannot afford to set apart large tracts of land to keep twenty-five million people in a tribal paradise. Naturally, the acculturation of the tribals, their transition almost overnight from a prehistoric era to the modern industrial age, creates for them formidable difficulties and results in deep mental unrest. Here and there, this disturbed state of mind already reveals

itself in the rise of so-called 'Messianic' movements. Such movements are also reported from Africa and the Pacific Islands among peoples experiencing similar cultural upheavals. In Chhota-Nagpur and in the country of the Bhils, new prophets are rising—the so-called bhagats—who promise their followers an earthly paradise and a new era of freedom from oppression.

Such prophets are not new in tribal India; about sixty years ago, a certain Birsa excited many thousands of Oraon and Munda to open revolt; and earlier still, similar agitations arose among the Ho and Santal, and among the Bhil. The rising of new religious prophets today is a signal that a dangerous situation is developing which the Government should not ignore. In the past, these agitations have often resulted in revolts which had to be suppressed by force. The aboriginals of Central India will not be able to retain their ancient ways of living. They are bound to lose their tribal character and will be absorbed by the new national culture which is in the making. It is to be hoped that public and private agencies will exert themselves to the utmost to help the aboriginals pass through this critical stage of transition with as little physical suffering and mental heartbreak as possible.

India's Eastern Tribes

NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE

When one reviews the position of tribal communities in eastern India one is at once struck by the variety of ways in which they make their living. I believe that what is of primary importance to a tribe is the way in which it makes its living; although this is unfortunately an aspect of its life and culture to which less attention is paid by anthropologists in general than to the peculiarities of artistic products, social organisation and so on. Perhaps it is necessary for anthropologists to fall in line with the idea dominant in army circles, namely, that an army marches upon its belly. This is also true of every tribal.

There is a fairly wide range of activities by means of which tribal communities in eastern India earn their living. Tribes like the Adi or Naga of north-eastern India depend mainly upon cultivation without the plough. The Juang or some of the hill tribes of Orissa also live by shifting cultivation in which the plough is not used. It is interesting, however, to note that the Orissan or Central Indian tribes are surrounded on all sides by people who practise wet cultivation by means of the plough. In contrast, the hill tribes of Assam may be said to be comparatively isolated.

Isolation is never complete, for even such tribes have to gather necessary articles such as iron, salt, etc., by means of trade. In the case of the Orissan or Central Indian tribes, however, the degree of dependence upon neighbouring peasant communities or on traders who do not belong to the tribe is greater than in the case of the tribes of north-eastern India. So much so that in some parts of Orissa and northern Andhra, the tribal communities produce crops by shifting cultivation which are not consumed at home, but are meant for sale. Thus, in the first year of this kind of slash-and-burn type of cultivation, the Juang produce *til* or sesamum meant for sale. It is only in the second

year, when the fertility of the unploughed soil is partially reduced that rice is grown in the same field for domestic consumption. In any case, shifting cultivation does not necessarily mean economic isolation. It may bring about a closer interrelationship with neighbouring communities in an organisation in which the shifting cultivators produce certain specialised crops and exchange them for goods which they require from other people.

For example, some of the Saoras who live in the neighbourhood in Parlakimidi in the south of Orissa were found to produce crops for sale in the valley below, while some of them were actually employed as sweepers in the municipal town of Parlakimidi. Occasionally, the plains' people employ these tribal communities to continue the process of slash-and-burn type of cultivation on the hill-slopes so that some of the soil and ashes may be washed down during the next rains to their fields at the base of the hill. The isolation of communities practising primitive forms of production is not necessarily proportional to the primitiveness of their methods of production.

Another interesting case might be cited here by way of illustration. A section of the Mundari people, namely, the Birhor, live in the jungles of southern Bihar and northern Orissa. One branch among them is nomadic. It shifts its camp three times in a year according to the seasons and two very competent anthropologists imagine that its way of life is a 'survival' from the past, in the Tylorian sense of the term. But an enquiry into the history of several of these communities in Hazaribagh leads one instead to the hypothesis that they are not as isolated as they appear to be on first view. These Birhors are specialised in the manufacture of a particular kind of rope from jungle creepers, which is exchanged for paddy with the neighbouring Bihari farmers. Small game killed and captured is not consumed but sold instead to the nearby villagers for cash. The settlement of the Birhors, nowadays, is never very far but actually within easy reach of the villages of those who need goods produced by the Birhors. The hypothesis referred to is that the extreme specialisation of the Birhors, is a product of their own unfriendly contact with the neighbouring farming communities rather than an unchanged 'survival' from the past.

A large number of tribal communities in eastern India,

particularly in the plains, have taken to wet cultivation already. In this cultivation with the plough and bullock, they hardly differ from other farmers. Many Santals, Oraons, Mundas and Kharias have also found employment in the tea plantations of Assam or as farm labourers in the villages of western and northern Bengal. They retain their own language, live separately from their neighbours in settlements of their own and thus try to preserve their cultural integrity; but in economic affairs, they do not differ from other agricultural labourers who have nothing else for sale except their labour.

Some members of these tribal communities have succeeded in becoming owners of land. The money earned in tea plantations come in handy for this purpose. Quite often, prosperous families among such tribal peasantry try to rise higher in the social estimation of their Hindu neighbours. The Hindus worship various gods and goddesses and have certain practices which are absent in the culture of the tribes. And the tribal communities identify, perhaps unconsciously, these points of difference as the sources of power of the Hindu community. Consequently, they are attracted towards the imitation of the Hindus in worship as well as in certain social and ritual practices. Beef-eating is given up, the drinking and use of wine at social ceremonies and rituals is forsaken, and gods belonging to the Hindus are worshipped occasionally in their own tribal way.

Such a slow movement of economic change, spread over at least a hundred years or more, has led to the gradual absorption of some sections of tribal people into the Hindu fold. The Raj Gonds of Madhya Pradesh or the Tana Bhagat movements of Chhota Nagpur are cases in point. One thing, however, has happened during this process of slow Hinduisation. Those who became absorbed within the caste system were generally given a very low place in the system. Inwardly there was resentment, and consequently, the absorbed people, even after becoming a caste, tried to preserve their dignity and self-respect by remaining apart from their Hindu neighbours in social matters. There was economic integration, but none or very little at the social level.

Christian missionaries have operated for more than a century among these tribals. A human dignity was accorded to Christian converts which the tribals never received under Hinduism. But

dignity apart, the education given by missionaries in the arts and crafts and the help which was rendered to exploited tribal communities through the influence exercised by the missionaries among the rulers during British days, led to a fairly large-scale conversion to Christianity.

After Independence, a new situation has arisen. The Republic of India has decided to do justice to the hitherto exploited Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. There is an earnestness and, sometimes, even an overwhelming haste in the attempt to help such people. Sometimes. unfortunately, programmes are drawn, not so much on the basis of firm and accurate knowledge, but because of the stirrings of a retarded conscience. Money has been pouring in for the uplift of the tribal people, apart from the establishment of schools, ashrams, and through the extension of medical and agricultural services in areas predominantly inhabited by the tribal people. One of the results which has become increasingly evident is that some tribes are trying to take greater advantage of these benefits than the others. The result is that fields which need more water are left unirrigated, while those which have enough, receive more. This, of course, does not represent a universal truth.

Formerly, the tribal people exercised hardly any political power, but after the introduction of adult franchise, they are courted by political parties from all directions, particuarly when the time of election comes. The result has been that this new factor has begun to play a fairly important part in the changes to which tribes are being subjected today. There is nothing inherently wrong in this. As a matter of fact, every unit in India, tribal or non-tribal, should in fact share in political authority. But what is happening today under the exigency of present circumstances is that, among tribal communities, power tends to gravitate into small pockets, instead of being more uniformly distributed. For instance, the Santals of northern Orissa, who are a fairly advanced peasant community today, and among whom some have had the benefit of education in schools and colleges and of employment in the professions, are gradually assuming leadership in the hegemony of several tribes who speak allied languages. So much so, that a new script has been invented by a Santal author for printing books either in the Santali or Ho or Mundari language. The Roman script or

Hindi or Bengali are being banned by the authors of this movement.

This new situation in which political power has become an important variable has led, thus, not to a progressive isolation of tribes from the Hindus alone, but towards the formation among them of the nucleus of a dominant middle class. This might lead to a situation similar to the one which existed in rural Bengal in the past. There was the rise of a new middle class in place of the old one based on caste. And under the exigencies of modern economic development, this comparatively recent and almost purely economic middle class is being shifted once more so that some sections might rise to the rank of propertied rulers and others be merged with the proletariat.

Is it necessary for the tribes to go through a similar process before a better type of social and economic integration takes place? India has set her mind upon a socialistic pattern of economy. In it there shall be diversity under a general frame of unity. Could this pattern of life not be built among the tribal people without the bitter experience through which the general population of eastern India has been passing? Perhaps the solution lies in breaking the comparative isolation of the tribal people through the development of a reciprocal interest among the tribals and non-tribals alike regarding the language and the ways of life of each other. This would, hopefully, result in a harmonious development of all concerned through a beneficient exchange of creativity.

*Caste and Social Status**

ANDRE BETEILLE

There is much difference of opinion about the true or essential nature of caste. While it is outside the scope of the present paper to discuss this point, it has to be remembered that one's view of what caste will be in the future will depend on what one considers it to be today or to have been in the past.

There are some for whom the organising principle of caste is to be found in the ritual attitudes centering around purity and pollution; for them, a weakening of such attitudes would no doubt constitute indubitable evidence that caste is breaking down. Others have argued that relations between castes were essentially relations of cooperation and hence when castes become organised for political conflict, they cease to be castes; this position can easily be refuted, but I shall not pause to do so here. In fact, I shall not consider the changing relations between caste and politics because this subject has received much attention in recent years; instead I shall consider certain aspects of the caste system which are not generally discussed outside the circle of sociologists.

I shall take the view adopted by many since Max Weber that castes can best be understood as status groups. A status group is a collection of individuals who share a distinctive style of life and a certain consciousness of community. Status groups have to be distinguished from classes. Whereas classes are defined in terms of the relations of production, status groups have to be differentiated according to patterns of consumption. Also, status groups are ranked on a scale of honour which, as in the case of the caste system, may be quite elaborate. Status groups of course exist in all complex societies and there is no reason to believe that they cannot coexist with classes. But perhaps in no society have they been elaborated to such an extent as in

*From *Seminar* (70), June 1965.

traditional India. Ghurye has estimated that each linguistic region contains between 200 and 300 subcastes; in no part of the world do we encounter such a proliferation of status groups. Not only this: in India these status groups which we refer to as castes were almost entirely closed in traditional society. Their boundaries were sharply defined and were kept intact by ritual and legal sanctions.

The caste system is commonly viewed as an extreme example of an hierarchical system. It also evinces some of the properties of a segmentary system. That is, there are several levels of differentiation and these levels are related to each other in prescribed ways. In any given region, the population is first divided into broad groups such as Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Harijans (as in Madras or Mysore); each caste group is composed of a number of castes; these are divided into subcastes which may in turn be divided into sub-subcastes. A broad grouping may be referred to as a segment of a lower order and its subdivisions as segments of higher orders. This can best be illustrated with an example. The population of Tamilnadu may be grouped into Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Harijans. Each of these is a highly differentiated unit. The Brahmins for instance are divided into Smarthas, Shri Vaishnavas and others. The Smarthas are divided into Vadama, Brihacharanam, Aslasahashram and Vattiman. The Vadama in their turn are divided into Vadadesha and Chozhadesha subsections. Mrs. Karve has shown a similar pattern of segmentation in Maharashtra. Such patterns are to be found throughout the country although they are evidently far less elaborate in some parts than in others. I have said that each status group pursues a particular style of life by which it can be differentiated from the others. In general, the style of life of a higher order segment is more homogenous and distinctive than that of a lower order one. Thus, the Shri Vaishnavas share more things in common and have a keener sense of community than the Brahmins as a whole.

In somewhat different terms, one may say that an individual is a member of an expanding series of group, each of which may be referred to as a caste or 'jati'. He is at the same time a Vadama, a Smartha and a Brahmin, and these identities are relevant in different contexts. For instance, the unit which is relevant for marriage is different from that relevant to

participation in State politics. What is important however is that these identities constitute elements in a single series and hence the word 'caste' may be applied to all of them. Some have tried to make use of the terms 'caste' and 'subcaste', but this way of viewing the system is quite inadequate because, generally, there are several levels of differentiation rather than merely two or even three.

It is useful to view relations between the constituent units of the caste system in terms of their structural distance from each other. The structural distance between two subdivisions of the same subcaste is smaller than that between any of one of these and a subdivision of a different caste. In the example given earlier, the structural distance between Vadama and Brihacharanam is smaller than that between either of these and a subdivision of the Shri Vaishnavas, and that in turn is smaller than the distance between any of these and a subdivision of a non-Brahmin caste. In the past, structural distance was maintained not only through the pursuit of different styles of life but by interdictions of various kinds, on marriage, commensality and social interchange in general. Between segments which were closest to each other, it was generally maintained by the rule of endogamy. In the case of segments further apart, restrictions in addition to that on marriage also played a part. In the extreme case, it was kept in force by the obligation to preserve a minimum physical distance between individuals belonging to opposite ends of the caste hierarchy. The obligation to maintain structural distance was often associated with superiority and inferiority. This however was not always or necessarily the case. The rule of endogamy served also to maintain structural distance between subdivisions of the same subcaste generally regarded of equal rank. Thus, structural distance is to be reckoned horizontally as well as vertically.

Many changes have been taking place in styles of life distinctive of particular castes in the traditional system. In general, there is greater standardisation and increasing freedom to discard old ways of life and to adopt new ones. Srinivas has shown how, even in the past, structural distance could be shortened through the process of sanskritisation. The removal of many of the traditional legal and ritual sanctions during British rule and after led to an increase in the pace of

sanskritisation or to a diffusion of styles of life once distinctive of the upper castes among wider sections of society. Greater standardisation is accompanied by increased social interchange between groups which had in the past retained a degree of separateness. This brings about a redefinition of the boundaries between castes as they previously existed. But the manner in which this comes about shows clearly how concessions have to be made to the traditional principles of organisation. The most general tendency is towards a quasi-permanent aggregation of adjacent segments in the caste system. Barriers tend to be lowered most easily and effectively between groups which had in the past been structurally close to each other.

In the traditional system, the unit of commensality was defined fairly rigidly in terms of caste affiliation. In recent decades there has been a gradual expansion of this unit. To return to the earlier example, until thirty or forty years ago Smartha and Shri Vaishnava Brahmins did not generally interdine. Today they do so, but—at least in the rural areas—Brahmins still eat separately from non-Brahmins. In West Bengal, where the erosion of ritual values has gone further, Brahmins may interdine with 'clean' Sudras but not generally with members of the polluting castes.

The unit of endogamy has also expanded but to a far smaller extent. This is no doubt because, even in the traditional system, the unit of endogamy was generally much smaller than the unit of commensality. Thus, among Smartha Brahmins even in the past Vadama and Brihacharanam interdined but did not intermarry. In fact, each of these divisions was further subdivided (the Vadama into Vadadesha and Chozhadesha, and the Brihacharanam into Mazhanattu, Kandramanickyam, etc.), and marriage was confined within these smaller subdivisions. Today, however, marriages frequently take place across structurally adjacent segments such as Vadadesha and Chozadesha Vadama and even between Vadama and Brihacharanam. Intermarriage between Smarthas and Shri Vaishnavas is still uncommon and generally confined to urban, western-educated people. Far more rare are marriages between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Urban, western-educated Indians often maintain that inter-caste marriages are becoming increasingly common. What one means by an inter-caste marriage will depend no doubt on the meaning

one attaches to 'caste'. I have shown that the word caste has not one but several referants: it may refer to a particular unit, to a group of such units or to a subdivision of the unit. Thus, the relevant question in examining intermarriages is the amount of structural distance spanned in each particular instance. A marriage between Chozhadesha and Vadadesha Vadama is clearly not an intercaste marriage in the same sense as one between either of these and a non-Brahmin subcaste.

This kind of graduated expansion of the unit of endogamy is common throughout India. In Bengal, there are three primary divisions among the Brahmins—Rarhi, Barendra and Baidic—each of which is further subdivided. These subdivisions played an important part in the regulation of marriage until recently, but do not appear to do so any longer. Indeed, intermarriages even across these primary divisions is becoming increasingly common, although it is probably still exceptional in the rural areas. One could multiply examples of such extension of boundaries from different parts of the country and for different groups of castes. I have used mainly a single indicator—marriage—for studying changes in the composition of status groups, although other indicators such as commensality and co-residence could also be employed. In every society, an important area of one's social identity is defined by the group within which one marries whether because of prescribed rules of endogamy or as a result of some less articulate process of selection.

The process of horizontal extension sketched above is the consequence of a number of forces which were released during British rule. These include geographical mobility, western education and the creation of new occupation to which recruitment is at least in principle based on factors other than caste. Some of these forces tend in addition to create new cleavages which cut across the traditional ones. As a consequence, one encounters the emergence of new status groups based on a combination of factors, traditional and modern. Before considering the manner in which the two sets of factors are likely to combine, it is well to remember that traditional association plays an important part in the definition of status honour in every society.

Whereas the process of modernisation brings together

structurally adjacent castes, it also creates differentiation within each caste. Each cast tends to become increasingly heterogeneous in terms of occupation, income, education and rural-urban residence. All these factors play an important part in defining one's social identity in general and the universe of marriage in particular. It was to be realised, of course, that factors such as occupation, income and education, though not entirely determined by caste, are not altogether independent of it either. The proportion of salaried and professional people is much higher in some castes than in others. Thus, the process of horizontal extension is accompanied by one of vertical differentiation. In terms of the earlier example, an urbanised professional Vadama Brahmin father may be unprepared to give his daughter in marriage to an uneducated and impoverished member of his own subcaste; at the same time, he may be willing to arrange a marriage for her with a member of the closely related Brihacharanam subcaste whose occupation and educational background are similar to his own. But he would normally still be reluctant to accept a non-Brahmin as a son-in-law irrespective of his occupation, income or education. A kind of compromise tends to be reached in which new differences are accommodated by stretching the older meaning of caste, which in any case had at no time a fixed or single meaning.

It seems evident that internal differentiation has proceeded much further among some castes than others. Those castes which have been most open to westernisation are probably the ones which have changed most. Such for example are Brahmins, Kayasths, Nairs and, in general, castes which have taken to western education and middle-class occupations and are predominantly urban in their distribution. Peasant castes in the rural areas have perhaps retained a greater measure of homogeneity and appear on the whole to have undergone less change. However, in their case also, political factors are playing an important part in bringing together adjacent segments.

Many changes are taking place in the productive organisation as well as in the political system. These changes are not likely to lead to a disappearance of status groups, which in any case have to be differentiated from classes. It is quite possible to visualise different patterns of status groups coexisting with a

given economic or political system. Status groups derive their distinctive features not only from material elements but also from a variety of irreducible cultural and ideological factors. In India, the status groups of the future will no doubt carry the marks of the caste system which has played such an important part in the social history of the country.

*Inter-Caste Tensions**

R N SAKSENA

Caste in India has served definite functions; it has maintained opportunities for solidarity and mutual support and also served as a status system. The outstanding feature of caste has always been its hierarchical organisation. In the hierarchy of social organisation, there are castes of all shades and gradations. Thus, the element of status-prestige is the dominant trait of the system. Within the .caste, all the members have supported one another and enabled the needy and the impoverished to tide over their period of difficulty. The hierarchical organisation provided a place to all the castes, which enabled them to live together. The institution of caste, however, has changed in significant ways in the last hundred years or so, but scholars differ about the kind of significance which should be attached to these changes. In the opinion of a few social scientists, it is on the way out. Many others point out that while the pollution aspect of caste has weakened, and while there is always a loosening of certain other aspects, caste has shown a tremendous capacity for adjustment to new conditions and its continuance is not threatened in any manner.

Caste-consciousness is keen and expresses itself in many contexts. Since Indian social life is mainly articulated through caste, any organisation or association which is formed to further social interests tends to be coloured by caste. Even now it serves as a cementing force for group formation; for within the structure of a caste-oriented society, individual behaviour is largely regulated in terms of the expected and accepted norms of the caste in which the individual is born. His primary loyalties are to his kin and caste members at the local level. Even if he migrates to urban centres, it is essentially along caste lines; if

*From *Seminar* (70), June 1965.

he turns a factory worker, he returns to his village for traditional ceremonial occasions and, finally, after retirement.

In short, caste represents a close clustering of the members on family-kin-caste lines, especially with reference to birth, marriage, death and financial obligations. This restricts the mental outlook of the villagers particularly, which is likely to be traditional and caste-bound. This is so even now. Higher castes dominate over low castes in the rural community despite an intensive drive against this by the Community Development Programme. On the other hand, the Constitution aims at the establishment of a 'casteless and classless' society, which is a contradiction in itself. Every society has to be stratified along some lines with members occupying some positional rank, either in a caste hierarchy as in a rigidly stratified society or in a class hierarchy as in a comparatively open society. Egalitarianism, therefore, does not mean the absence of various levels of stratification. It has to be understood more in its economic context, in terms of equality of opportunity. If non-discrimination between castes has to be achieved, it is only possible by pulling up different caste members together within a class where equal opportunity and status prevails for all.

But can caste ever emerge into class? The roots of the caste system are too deep. Apart from its symbolic value, caste is 'the functioning unit' in the Hindu social system. There may have been changes in inter-caste or intra-caste relationships, but in its functioning, caste is as important a factor as ever in maintaining social distance as well as social solidarity. In a recent study of Jaunsar Bawar by the present writer, it was found that in spite of the keen desire of the Government to remove the social and economic handicaps of the Koltas, who form the depressed class and provide free labour to their landlords by tradition, it is not possible to remove their disabilities, since the Koltas themselves feel tied to their landlords by a tradition which is not easy for them to break. So, any amount of legislation or governmental effort has not succeeded in removing the disabilities which keep the Koltas in a perpetual state of economic serfdom. This role of caste is inevitable since, in the absence of well-developed interest-groups and voluntary associations, caste has filled an important gap in the life of the people.

Formerly, the caste provided what Iravati Karve has called the 'cultural gestalt'. It practically coincided with linguistic and territorial boundaries. But modern communication and transportation have pushed the boundaries of caste from the traditional village extension of the joint family to what are now regional alliances on kindred local units. The British anthropologist, Eric J. Miller, has demonstrated in a detailed case study of the Malayalam-speaking region that caste was traditionally

> a 'system of territorial segmentation' in which the bedrock unit was either the village (desam) or at most the chiefdom (nad). With modern social change, the old boundaries dependent on political cleavages, now became porous, ceasing to mark the limits of social relations with individual castes. This has enabled castes to establish internal bonds of solidarity over wide areas. The last 50 years have seen the growth of a formal regional organisation for practically every caste, with the avowed aim of...raising the status and prestige of a caste as a whole and free its members from exploitation and victimization by the other castes.[1]

This increasing solidarity in caste over large geographical distance has led in some way to the strengthening of the caste spirit, which is a new element in it. It has now become competitive. Thus, the traditional role of caste has now been revised. Formerly, caste minimised competition and promoted the spirit of live-and-let-live. A loyalty to its *biradari* or brotherhood meant strength of the system as a whole. But, for caste to become the basis of economic and political enfranchisement and power politics, as well as increasing economic competition, it is bound to magnify all its worst features. This has raised a vast hue and cry against 'casteism'.

Caste, which once expressed social control at the level of a functionally integrated village, now reinforces economic and political conflict, which occurs for the most part within the same linguistic regional boundaries demarcating the newly extended

[1]Eric J. Miller, 'Caste and Territory in Malabar', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 56, No. 3, June 1954, p. 418-19.

caste alignment. As D. R. Gadgil has very succinctly pointed out:

> Social and economic gradations (formerly) roughly extended to the gradation of castes. But now that we want equality and have decided to get rid of the caste system, we face the problem of preserving a live-and-let-live philosophy.[2]

Thus, the associational functions of caste have assumed a greater significance while the institutional functions have receded into the background.

The Constitutional provisions guaranteeing specific numbers of government jobs, legislative seats and school admissions to notified untouchable and low castes, have also sharpened consciousness on an enormous scale. This merits greater detail in the discussion on untouchability.

It is difficult to arrive at a clear-cut definition of untouchability. It can better be understood in terms of an ascending scale of social avoidance as given below:

1. against sitting on a common floor,
2. against inter-dining,
3. against admittance into the kitchen,
4. against touching metal pots,
5. against mixing in social festivals,
6. against admittance into the interior of a house,
7. against any kind of physical contact.

It is a mass phenomenon of group prejudices and discrimination affecting about sixty million people and 429 communities (untouchable caste groups) in India, i.e., nearly one-sixth of the total population, according to the 1961 census.

Hutton had divided the disabilities from which the so-called untouchables suffer into two initial categories:

1. that under which they are barred from public utilities, such as the use of roads, tanks, wells, etc.,

[2]Report of a Seminar on Inter-disciplinary Indian Studies, Poona, 1955, p. 27.

2. their religious disabilities which debar them from the use of temples, burning grounds and similar institutions.

In addition to the above, there are the disabilities involved in relations with private individuals, such as the services of barbers, washermen, tailors, etc. Restrictions on their dress and ornaments are also imposed in certain regions. The differentiations are generally understood throughout the country and learnt by the children. Thus, the Chamar learns from his early childhood that he is excluded from the Brahmin's house, while the Dom knows that he should not make any contact whatever. The hierarchical status of the whole system is clear to every one. The scavenging castes are absolutely segregated even by the Chamar group, which itself is avoided by the rest of the community. Naturally, the proximity of living quarters is another very good indicator of the degree of inter-caste acceptance. Typically, the lower castes live on the fringe of the outskirts of the village or, in some cases, at a distance from it. The same sort of problems appear in the cities.

The problems of the so-called untouchables are, therefore, different in form and substance from those of the Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes. While educational and economic backwardness is common to all, untouchability and the disabilities arising out of it are problems peculiar to them. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the appalling living and working conditions of the untouchable castes aroused human sympathy and public opinion veered round, particularly under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, to realising the degrading effects of untouchability. The impact of Gandhiji's influence and work in this area was felt more strongly perhaps after his martyrdom than it was when he was alive. Vincent Sheean in his book, *Lead Kindly Light*, writes:

> at that time, extraordinary events were taking place all over India, testifying to the depth with which the departure of the country's father was felt. To most Indians life without Gandhiji was very nearly inconceivable. There were many determined efforts on the part of many thousands of Hindus to get the gates of temples opened to the untouchables. This has been one of Gandhiji's projects, urged upon his compatriots in and

out of season as a means of breaking down untouchability. In various parts of India, Hindus of high caste joined with the untouchables in attempts to penetrate the temples and large numbers of them offered satyagraha, submitted to arrest and imprisonment in this cause. In the result, laws were passed in several provinces opening the temple door to the out-castes, another step was taken towards the abolition of Hinduism's most unlovely excrescence.

Perhaps the most significant sign of exclusion of the Harijans relates to the use of the water-supply. A scavenger cannot draw water from a common source along with the rest of the upper castes; he must have his own well or stand at a distance for some one to give him water. Not only does this curtail the limited water supply for him, whose requirements for personal hygiene may perhaps be the greatest, but he is sometimes compelled to satisfy his water needs from a stagnant pool or even a drain, or may share the filthy and contaminated water with cattle.

Now, all these social discriminations and avoidances are prohibited under law. In particular, a special provision under the Fundamental Rights has been laid down in the Constitution for the removal of untouchability. In addition, while various laws have been passed by the State Governments to punish certain kinds of actions involving its practice, the Centre has passed the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, which has made the offence cognisable and punishable under law, uniformly throughout the territory of India. But it is one thing to legislate and another to implement such legislation. It is true that one cannot now legally discriminate against Harijans in employment and other public dealings. However, the fact remains that they live for the most part as they have traditionally lived, carrying out the dirtiest and most menial forms of work, particularly so in rural areas, since the evil is intricately woven in the social fabric itself.

It is not proposed to go into details of the efforts made by the Government to fight untouchability or to render help to the Harijans in this paper. I would prefer to confine myself to one important aspect of it. The problem of the removal of untouchability should be treated more as a matter of social reform than as a part of administrative and legal measures. It is more a problem of social distance, group prejudice and certain

social attitudes and stereotypes. The Renuka Ray Committee was alive to the issue. The Committee was of the view that:

> Since Independence, while legislative measures have been introduced and State resources spent on a more extensive scale, the results have not been commensurate with the efforts.... The Government of India have sanctioned, during the last few years, large grants to non-official organisations for purposes of carrying out publicity and propaganda against (the) practice of untouchability. While some organisations, which have a long standing record of substantial service to the Harijans, have made full and proper use of these grants, it is noticed, however, that some organisations of recent origin are engaged mostly in publicity work with the help of government grants. It is a matter of common knowledge that the programme of publicity is not a visibly established programme like that of welfare services. Further, since the results of such publicity are intangible, it cannot be stated with certainty that the grants through these organisations are achieving their objectives.

The Renuka Ray Committee put it rather mildly. In actual practice, the publicity indulged in is more in the nature of self-publicity rather than any attempt to highlight the evils of untouchability and thus bring about a change in the attitude of the masses towards the Harijans. Similarly, provision for additional facilities like separate schools, crafts training centres, housing colonies and the like will not by themselves serve to eradicate the evil. In the first place, this approach will encourage segregation, isolate the Harijans and thereby perpetuate the evil of untouchability. Second, unlike the tribals who are mostly concentrated in certain defined areas, the Harijans are spread all over the country. Even on grounds of expediency, it is not feasible to accept this principle of segregation and spread it throughout the length and breadth of the country. The real problem is that so long as the Harijans remain as 'untouchables', their mobility in every field and walk of life is bound to be restricted. Hence, the problem of untouchability is primarily a question of social reform; other measures can only serve as palliatives.

In short, what is needed is a new outlook and a complete

change in social attitudes. Perhaps compulsory education at the earlier stages in schools, where students of all castes are fully admitted, and abolition of the system of labelling schools or wells as Harijan schools or wells for the use of Harijans, will create a better climate for the integration of Scheduled Castes with the upper castes. Even the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes in the legislatures and various government services is bound to prove harmful from a broader point of view, since it will perpetuate, more or less, the existence of the so-called depressed classes; for they will always feel insecure if the existing privileges are taken away from them. Thus, an under-privileged social class with constitutional safeguards and certain benefits guaranteed to it becomes segregated and the social distance from other castes remains as great as before, although from a legal and constitutional point of view, such a distance may not exist at all.

*Caste and Politics**

V M SIRSIKAR

In any realistic assessment of the role of caste in Indian politics now and in the future, it would be necessary to caution oneself against any simplified explanation of this complex and age-old phenomenon. What is attempted here is to focus attention on certain aspects of the problem as highlighted by some of the recent trends in India's social and political life. If a distinction was possible between the form and the style of our poiltics, it could be said that while the form was no doubt secular, the style was essentially casteist.

From the point of view of social reconstruction, the aspect of the caste system which assumes significance is that it is a structure of impermeable elitism, with all the force of tradition built over thousands of years behind it. It would be far from the truth to suppose that caste has ceased to be a determinant of elite status in our country. This traditional factor largely influences the formation of 'modern' 'democratic' elites. In this connection, it would be very revealing to find the socio-economic background, not only of the political leaders but that of the top bureaucrats, brass hats, intellectuals and all those who influence political decision-making.

No comprehensive study of the Indian elites has yet been made. But it would not be unreasonable to say that in the formation of various elites, the so-called higher and middle castes have always an extraordinary advantage over the so-called lower castes. This of course does not imply that caste is the sole determinant of social status and an entry-permit to the elite-group. Caste, no doubt, is at present operating in a changing society. This fact may sometimes help a few 'plebian' aspirants to get the 'patrician' status, irrespective of their caste.

*From *Seminar* (70), June, 1965.

With Independence and the adoption of universal franchise, a new phase has begun in the history of caste in this country. Universal franchise opened the immense possibilities of securing political power for the majority middle castes who were hitherto denied their legitimate share of power, owing to a very restricted franchise based on property and education. The freedom movement had made the Congress the most important political institution and centre of power in the country. The caste-groups which 'captured' the Congress were expected to get the best of the bargain. It is not necessary here to dilate on the historical circumstances and the process which inducted the majority caste-groups in various areas into the Congress; it is interesting to note that, although there were variations in the caste hierarchy, in many regions generally the middle caste-groups occupied the centre of the stage.

What has been said above about the middle castes does not imply that certain so-called lower castes, with small numerical strength, have been able to improve their socio-economic and political lot. On the other hand, it can be reasonably argued that their position might have worsened due to the competitive character of politics suddenly assuming alarming proportions. It would be worthwhile to find out, in this regard, the position of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in politics, notwithstanding the personal improvement in the political status of a few individuals belonging to this group. In this connection, it is significant that neo-Buddhism is looked upon by the caste-Hindus as a political 'stunt' rather than religious conversion for a social change.

Caste is the traditional integrative agency. It has now aligned itself with the modern integrative agency—the political party. In this process, caste achieves new strength. This is owing to the fact that traditional loyalties can be exploited to achieve goals of political power. It is sometimes conveniently assumed that there is nothing wrong in such exploitation so far as the ends are served. The caste system may have lost some of its ritualistic and traditional function as the regulator of social behaviour. But now it assumes the new role of regulating political behaviour. The belief that caste has shown signs of decline and withering away arises out of this loss of its ritualistic aspect. A Brahmin does not perform any of his traditional priesthood functions. He

adopts the westernised way of living, including non-vegetarian food (and sometimes alcohol). But he remains a 'Brahmin' to the core so far as his personal and political life is concerned. This secularisation of the power of caste does not represent its decline; it means the unobtrusive and inarticulated adjustment of the traditional factor with modern democratic politics.

Sometimes it is argued that the present Indian society has become a federation of castes, equal in status although not in numbers. The argument implies that the hierarchy and the elitist structure has disappeared and the various castes are like various groups in Western society. But it is felt that this view, although very welcome, is more in the nature of an ideal-construct than a reflection of a reality. It is probably out of sheer politeness that many refuse to face certain unpleasant realities in Indian politics, the most unpleasant being that of caste. What is really necessary is to face the unpleasant and attempt an objective assessment which may eventually facilitate a solution of the problem. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is possible in India to change your religion but not your caste.[1] This need not surprise anyone. Religion, compared to the caste-groups, is a distant and diffused matter. The individual 'belongs' to a concrete reality—caste, while he merely follows a religion which is an abstract thing.

The caste system performs roles which could be put down as personal, social, economic and political. So far as the personal role is concerned, it may be necessary to focus attention on its impact on the other three roles. It would be too much to expect that a person who is casteist in his personal life would be non-caste in his socio-political life. The personal role of caste may mean, in general, one's belief in the traditional structure, the preference for marriage-relations within the caste-group and the sense of belonging to a particular caste. The social role relates to the non-political sphere of activities. Here, the factor of caste becomes very important. One finds it operating in a subtle manner through educational, social and charitable institutions, housing and cooperative societies, clubs and community centres.

[1]In Maharashtra there are Konkanastha Brahmin Christians, Saraswat Christians, Mahar Christians and they rigidly follow the taboos about intercaste marriages and inter-dining.

This affects the future of caste in the sense that the individual succumbs to the environment created around him. It creates an in-group psychology in the individual for his own caste, which finds expression through speech and deed. This environment, in a sense, decides the whole ethos of the individual's life.

The occupational exclusiveness—the economic role of caste—may appear to be losing ground in the face of industrialisation and urbanisation. The faith that the modernising processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and western education will magically dissipate this problem of caste indicates a misplaced romantic enthusiasm rather than an objective understanding of the perplexing phenomenon. Actually, caste is operating in a more disastrous but subtle way. One now requires a 'correct' caste to join State services and industrial employment, not to mention educational institutions.

In an emergent democracy, wedded to welfarism, caste assumes a certain significance because political power based on the rural masses is used to distribute economic benefits and economic power to the rural elites at the cost of the urban elites, generally belonging to minority upper castes or to caste-groups belonging to other regions. In this connection, it would be useful to study the emerging power-structure in the Panchayati Raj. There are no built-in checks in the Panchayati Raj to prevent the concentration of power—economic, political and social—taking place at the wrong levels. The business elites in this country present an interesting example of the persistent influence of caste in the socio-economic spheres. Without being dogmatic, it could be said that in an industrial empire belonging to one caste-group, the entry of other castes in senior executive and power-positions is an exception. This does not mean that lower and middle positions are freely available to anyone with the necessary qualifications. But the higher echelons of business elites are maintained religiously 'homogeneous' in composition.

It is necessary to remember that it is not an accident that some of our universities have been 'unofficially' called 'Brahmin', 'Chettinad', 'Lingayat' and 'Kayastha' universities. What needs to be further emphasised is that none of these institutions has been accused of belonging to a 'class', whether bourgeois, middle or proletarian. As a footnote it may be added here that certain universities do not consider it improper to ask the

applicant to state his caste. It is reported that where an applicant failed to mention his caste, the Vice-Chancellor thought it necessary to ascertain it before considering him for admission. Can we be very optimistic in such a situation about the early decline and eventual disappearance of caste? The role of caste in our educational institutions, especially those of higher learning, cannot be viewed with equanimity. The obvious danger to educational standards and values comes from the surreptitious entry of caste. Sometimes, it is naively argued in certain quarters that other things remaining equal, there is no harm in a selection being made on the basis of caste. It is conveniently forgotten that other things do not remain the same because of the weightage given to the factor of caste.

The four roles of caste are not only interlinked, but are influenced by each other. It requires a highly sophisticated understanding of Indian society and politics and perhaps an impossible degree of abnegation on the part of the political activists to operate two sets of behaviour—casteist in other spheres and non-casteist in political life. The result is not surprising. Under the cross-pressures of caste and political loyalties, there is a verbalised acceptance and a loud expression of secular politics[2] and at the same time a meek, silent surrender to caste politics.[3] This phenomenon has now been adequately documented in the researches in contemporary politics carried out by both Indian and foreign scholars. The attempt to wish away caste from Indian politics does not appear to have succeeded.

In any realistic evaluation of social change in India it would not be prudent to assume that the present accentuation of caste-loyalties, or their extension of new areas of activities, would mean the impending collapse of the system. On the other hand, it could be argued that the so-called modernisation is at best skin-deep, and that the social change has as yet not really affected the hard core of the traditional society both in rural and urban India. It is felt that our cities are not genuinely metropolitan areas with the proper intellectual climate. They

[2]The denunciation of caste, casteism and casteist politics is done from house tops by all parties and leaders in and out of season.

[3]See *Economic Weekly*, August and September 1962, for a series of articles on voting behaviour in the 1962 General Elections.

are just a conglomeration of villages, with the traditional partitioning of areas on the basis of caste. Verbalised social values of secular democracy expressed by the urban elites have not been internalised even by them, not to speak of the rural masses. Social change has remained confined to the elites of all caste-groups. The majority of most castes has remained impervious to the winds of change. Thus, in any conflict between rival elites, both find it handy to get the backing of the masses through the traditional channel of caste, using the traditional techniques and symbols.[4] The more tragic part of the whole story is that no one feels that such use is incongruous with secular, democratic politics. In defence, it is sometimes pointed out that the western societies are not free from such lapses in their political life. But it is felt that in a caste-ridden, traditional society, it is all the more necessary to be cautious about the use of techniques which are anti-democratic in character and which strengthen traditional bonds and loyalties rather than democratic values.

The strengthening of caste-loyalties could be ascribed to certain psychological factors. The leader, to be effective and successful, must psychologically belong to the group he attempts to lead. A sharing of the attitudes, beliefs and values of the group makes the leader acceptable. If caste decides the whole ethos of the individual's life, it is but logical that he should have a preference for a leader who belongs to his caste. Psychologically speaking, leadership is a function of personality structures of the led and the leader. It is not necessary here to dilate upon the impact of caste on the personality structures of the common people in this country. With the efflux of time, the 'all India' leadership born out of the freedom struggle, having a larger perspective and broader interests, is giving place to the 'new men of power' whose identification with the local, narrow, caste interests is obvious. This new leadership is 'representative' by with mass base and it articulates the aspirations and expectations of the masses.

When Professor Morris-Jones refers to the traditional (caste) idiom in Indian politics, he is referring to an unpleasant reality. But this candour need not hurt our over-sensitive patriotism.

[4]V. M. Sirsikar, *Political Behaviour in India*, P. C. Manaktala and Sons, Bombay, 1965, pp. 86-9.

The existence of all the three political idioms—the western, traditional and saintly—just as it poses a problem, affords a certain solace. It means that the traditional has to compete with the other two. This may result in weakening the traditional if the other two are consciously strengthened.

It would not be correct to ascribe the absence of a revolution in India to the effectiveness of the caste system. The dialectics of a revolution could not operate in the post-independence period for a variety of reasons. The semblance of a revolutionary creed was with the Congress. The CPI had failed to understand the pulse of the masses and had alienated itself from the mainstream of Indian nationalism. The 'peaceful transfer' of power contributed in a large measure to make the situation non-revolutionary. The proverbial fatalism of the masses, with a rural conservatism, makes them prefer any status quo to a hazardous revolutionary change. In the conflict between castes and political parties, the fight is between a social institution having a standing of thousands of years and political associations with barely a life of a few decades. Moreover, Indian political parties are weak in both organisational structure and ideological fabric. The Congress is the only party which can boast of an all-India organisational structure. But it does not need proving that the party has a weak ideological fabric. The latter permits partymen to stretch it to suit their political ends. That a majority of political parties exploit casteism for their own purposes is indubitably true. It would be remarkably naive of them not to do so and exploitation of the caste-appeal to win elections is regarded as permissible.

A word of caution about the approach of the author to this vexing problem. He has full faith that the final outcome of the struggle between the forces of traditionalism and modernity will be in favour of secular democracy. The democratic process and democratic institutions in this country are to some extent distorted by the factor of caste. But at the same time, democratic mechanisms and techniques would gradually affect and undermine in a perceptible manner the influence of caste in politics. The very fact that no party likes to be a one-caste organisation and attempts to be a multicaste organisation, indicates a ray of hope. But the process of making politics secular in the true sense of the term demands heavy sacrifices on the part of the

party-in-power, the intellectuals and the institutions of social change.

The attempt to banish caste by dropping its mention in the census, 1951 and 1961 was, to say the least, juvenile. It was a romantic belief in the efficacy of a governmental fiat. It only made sociological research more difficult. What was necessary to adopt was a non-caste approach to election politics. Even at the risk of losing a few seats to the opposition, the Congress could have set a pattern of secular politics, of having candidates who did not belong to the majority castes in the relevant constituencies. Even now, if the vicious circle of election politics based on caste is to be broken, it would devolve on the Congress to set the example. There is no automatic guarantee that the example would be followed. But the risk will have to be taken if the professed loyalties to democracy are worth the name. The non-caste behaviour of the Congress, the major centre of political power, would generate a climate of opinion which it would be difficult for the other contending parties to ignore.

If an effort could be made to alter the caste character of educational institutions, by a regular exchange of teachers between universities, it would go a long way. It would not be possible even for a diehard casteist to stick to his behaviour pattern when he would face an entirely new social situation. The universities could plan an important part in the 're-education' of our leaders, political workers and citizens.

No prophecy is possible regarding the date when caste would disappear from the socio-political life of this country. But the strengthening, in a conscious manner, of political parties based on economic programmes, of groups based on economic interests, free and voluntary associations, could be suggested as one way to dislodge caste from its present position. Political loyalties, union loyalties, class-consciousness, the rational and scientific outlook, are factors which, if consciously cultivated, could create the proper intellectual climate for a modernising, secular, democratic society.

*The Problem of Untouchables**

B K ROY-BURMAN

Gandhi named the untouchables Harijans—the children of God. Many among the untouchable castes, particularly the educated ones, did not take to this nomenclature kindly. They wondered why they had been singled out to be the children of God. Were not others also the children of God? When the untouchables were specially mentioned, did it not merely mean that attempts were being made to make their conditions tolerable rather than destroy the system which bred inequality?

Ambedkar was relentless in his criticism of the orientation given by Gandhi to the national movement on the question of the untouchables. No doubt, in 1921, Gandhi wrote in *Young India*:

> I consider the removal of untouchability as a most powerful factor in the process of attainment of Swaraj.

Uplift of the untouchables was an important item in the Bardoli programme of constructive work drawn up in 1922. In 1932-33, under the inspiration of Gandhi, the Harijan Sevak Sangh was organised to work for the removal of the social disabilities of the untouchables.

But, there is the other side of the picture as well. In 1921-22 Gandhi wrote in *Nava-Jivan*:

> To destroy the caste system and adopt the western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation which is the soul of the caste system.

*From *Seminar* (177), May 1974.

> Hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder. I have no use for a Brahmin if I cannot call him a Brahmin for my life. It will be a chaos if every day a Brahmin is to be changed into a Shudra and a Shudra is to be changed into a Brahmin.

Gandhi went further and observed:

> The caste system is a natural order of society. In India it has been given a religious coating. (quoted in *What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*. B. R. Ambedkar, 1948, p. 287)

Even regarding the specific aspects of the disabilities suffered by the untouchable castes, Gandhi's utterances are open to various interpretations.

> Inter-dining and inter-caste marriages are in no way essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood or for the removal of untouchability (*Harijan*, 29.4.33, p. 2).

Thirteen years later, Gandhi seems to have shifted his position considerably. In his own words:

> At one time I did say that inter-dining was not an essential part of the campaign for the removal of untouchability. Personally, I was for it. Today, I encourage it. In fact, today I even go further. (*Harijan*, 28.7.46, p. 316)

It cannot, however, be stated that Gandhi's shifts of position have uniformly been in the direction of an assertion of greater rights for the untouchables. In 1933, he wrote:

> Temple entry is the one spiritual act that would constitute the message of the freedom to the 'untouchables' and assure them that they are not outcastes before God. (*Harijan*, 11.2.33, p. 5)

But in 1934 he wrote;

> I have absolutely no desire that the temple should be opened

to Harijans, until caste Hindu opinion is ripe for the opening. It is not a question of Harijans asserting their right of temple entry or claiming it. They may or may not want to enter that temple even when it is declared open to them. But it is the bounden duty of every caste Hindu to secure that opening for Harijans. (*Harijan*, 23.2.34, p. 10)

It is not difficult to understand why some sections of the untouchable elite consider that in this orientation the functional equivalent of the 'children of God' is the ornamentation of their position as the helpless creatures at the mercy of man. Ambedkar has caustically commented on this approach:

Why appeal to the worst of human failings, namely, pride and vanity in order voluntarily to accept what on a rational basis he would resent as a crule discrimination against him? What is the use of telling the scavenger that even a Brahmin is prepared to do scavenging when it is clear that according to the Hindu Shastras and Hindu notions, even if a Brahman did scavenging, he would never be subject to the disabilities of one who is a born scavenger. For, in India, a man is not a scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth, irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not. If Gandhism preached that scavenging was a noble profession, with the objective of inducing those who refuse to engage in it, one could understand it. But why appeal to the scavenger's pride and vanity in order to induce him and him only to keep scavenging by telling him that scavenging is a noble profession and that he need not be ashamed of it? To preach that poverty is good for the Shudra untouchables and for none else, to preach that scavenging is good for the untouchables and for none else and to make them accept these onerous impositions as voluntary purposes of life, by appeal to their failings is an outrage and a cruel joke on the helpless classes' (*What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, B. R. Ambedkar, 1948, pp. 303-4).

One can argue that Ambedkar was too harsh to Gandhi. He failed to appreciate that Gandhi was moving both ahead of his time and along with it. When Gandhi speaks of hereditary

occupation as a natural order, he refers to the limits of occupational mobility. As an ideal, it is obviously incompatible with the democratic ethos of modern society. What, however, appealed to Gandhi was the so-called non-competitive basis of economic organisation inherent in the caste system or the apparent security of economic pursuits provided by it to the artisan and servicing castes. But it was the security of the cage. Perhaps it was not an iron cage; it was a bamboo cage with many holes.

In rejecting discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or religion, except for protective discrimination, in favour of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, India's Constitution has rejected hereditary occupations as an ideal. But, for social planning one cannot overlook the existence of considerable occupational immobility as an empirical fact. It is true of almost any society. In Soviet Turkmenia, for instance, even fifty years after the socialist revolution, I was told that the bulk of the shoe-shine boys were Bokhara Jews, the road cleaners were Kurds.

Looked at in a different way, Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi was a critique of Hindu society as a whole. When the untouchables are considered to be the children of God, whose position is to be retrieved within the framework of the caste system, two courses of action follow. The untouchable castes spend their social energy in the blind alley of Sanskritisation. They accept one of the economically and politically dominant castes, which also enjoys a high ritual status, as the reference group and emulate its life-style. They give up widow remarriage, go in for child marriage, abjure from non-vegetarian food, discourage outdoor activities by their females, but what do they gain? They do not have the economic resources at their command; neither do they have the aura of history behind them. Soon they find themselves in the arid zone of vanishing dreams. The rest of society also tries to be godly to the children of God. Ameliorative and welfare programmes are launched. But the magnitude of the effort is frequently determined by political pressures and pulls. Ambedkar has described such activities as political charity.

Before Independence, the ameliorative and welfare programmes promoted by non-official agencies set up on Gandhi's initiative mainly related to the provision of Sources of drinking water, eradication of illiteracy and inculcation of hygienic habits.

Simultaneously, attempts were made to persuade the caste Hindus to admit the untouchables to the temples in different parts of the country.

The Constitution of free India requires the State to undertake activities for the advancement of education, removal of disabilities and improvement of the conditions of life of the untouchables, as a statutory obligation. Besides, there are reservations of castes in legislatures, educational institutions and public services. Undoubtedly, impressive efforts have been made by the organs of the State and State supported non-official agencies to implement the programme. But side by side there has been social sabotage by the dark forces of society.

I was visiting a high school set up under the Scheduled Castes welfare programme. I was told that the children of the sweepers were studying along with the children of the caste Hindus in the school. On verification I found that it was true; but the sweeper children were segregated in separate benches in one corner of the same class.

In one district of a progressive State, the District Magistrate informed me that there was no untouchability in his district. As I was coming out of his office, his sweeper approached me. He was finding it difficult to get his son admitted to the primary school, I approached the teacher. He assured me that he did not believe in untouchability. But as he came to the class in the morning immediately after bathing and performing puja, he did not like to be defiled by touching a sweeper boy. He had no objection to teaching the boy if a night class were started. It goes without saying that this god-fearing man did not mention the extra remuneration he expected when a night class was started.

In another State, God's shadow stopped on the verandah of the school. The teacher not only admitted the children of the fisherman caste to the school, he even allowed them to hear the lessons sitting on the verandah while the children of the caste Hindus sat inside the room. In still another State, the sons of the untouchable castes and caste Hindus were living in the same hostel of a secondary school, but they were mutually segregated in different rooms. Besides, while the caste Hindu students were not required to wash their plates after eating, the scheduled caste students were required to do so. In the case of the former,

the plates were washed by the menials of the hostel.

Even so, this state of affairs was nothing compared to what was practised in another school in a 'progressive' State. In the latter, the caste Hindu students had gone on strike when untouchable students were admitted to their hostel. As a compromise, an adjoining building was taken on rent and the untouchable students were lodged there, even though the two hostels were put under the same administrative control. Even the enlightened youth fail to recognise their brothers in the faces of the 'children of God'.

Social sabotage takes myriads of forms. In one State, a Gandhi-ghar (Home of Gandhi) was constructed as the symbol of unity of the village. But the village means 'all excepting the untouchables'. On the other hand, if the untouchables were denied their share, it might invoke the wrath of the State. A second Gandhi-ghar was therefore constructed in the untouchable locality.

Providing separate drinking water wells for the untouchables under the programme for the removal of untouchability is a common practice almost everywhere. One may, however, wonder whether it does not have just the opposite effect by legitimising untouchability. But here is a real dilemma, and one does not know how to resolve it. The untouchables are too weak in the local power structure to assert their right to draw water from the common village well. Legal action can assist them to a limited extent only. In this context, should their minimum right as citizens to have an assured source of drinking water remain in abeyance until the legal and the moral issues are sorted out with the caste Hindus? In short, though put somewhat crudely, the essential question remains: should institutional reform or amelioration come first?

Even in respect of economic welfare schemes, the same dilemma continues. Although a large number of schemes have been introduced to diversify the occupational structure of the untouchable castes, quite frequently the bulk of them remain tied down to their traditional occupations. An improvement in the economic life of these people would require strengthening the technological and economic base of occupations. Where attempts in this direction have been successful, two contradictory results follow. Either the traditional association of the caste with the

occupation is strengthened or it is weakened. Where the association is strengthened, it also reinforces casteism and delays the transformation of the social structure. Where the association is weakened, new sets of people get into the occupation and derive the benefits of improved technology; but the craftsmen belonging to the untouchable castes are thrown out. They cannot immediately take to alternative occupations with higher returns. Thus, they suffer economic insecurity and are impoverished.

Reservations in the services also seem to have yielded diminishing returns to the untouchable castes. Even twenty-five years after Independence, the proportion of Scheduled Castes in the Class I, II and III services are meagre, in spite of the reservations. Besides, during this period, occupational opportunities in trade and commerce and industries in the private sector have increased considerably. But few from among the untouchable castes have been able to reach administrative, ministerial and supervisory positions in these concerns. Various studies and enquiries suggest that there is considerable evasion on the part of the employers at different levels. There is, however, another aspect to the question. Reservation conditioned the educated elites among the untouchable castes to look upon the administrative bureaucracy as their reference group. Psychologically, they orient themselves towards it. When they cannot get into it, they feel excessively frustrated; and at the same time, they can hardly take any entrepreneurial role in trade, commerce and other arenas.

There is also a growing realisation among some sections of the untouchable elites that it is not always desirable that government service should absorb their best talent solely because of the facility of reservation. As government servants, politics is taboo and this rules out the potential of competent leaders from among them. They deplore that scheduled caste leadership is absent even in their non-official organisations which receive State assistance. In this matter, however, apart from the availability of competent workers, the basic question of organisational strategy is involved which will be discussed separately.

If the long-range benefit of reservation in the services is being questioned, there should also be rethinking on the actual impact of reservation in educational institutions and in the legislatures, and of the special schemes of benefit to the Scheduled Castes. There is reason to believe that although the actual percentage

of literacy among the Scheduled Castes is still rising, the rate of progress in literacy has been falling. It seems that reservation in educational institutions has strengthened an elitist orientation. The gap between the educated and the uneducated among the untouchables is thus increasing.

Against this widening gap, reservation in the legislatures frequently encourages the fragmentation of their political will. This provides the climate which makes it possible even to use the special programmes for their welfare against their interest. Such programmes in the special sector are meant to supplement the programmes for the benefit of the Scheduled Castes in the general sector. But, frequently, the existence of programmes in the special sector is used as a plea for doing nothing in the general sector. This would have been justified had the per capita outlay in the special sector been at least equal to the per capita outlay in the general sector. But, it is nowhere near that. In desperation, today, many among the Scheduled Castes are wondering whether they would have received a better deal without the special sector provisions. This, however, is difficult to prove: the distortion has taken place at the implementation stage of the plan and such distortion could have taken place even without the special sector.

The picture so far gives an idea of the near dead-end that the approach to the Scheduled Castes with its welfare-ameliorative-protective discrimination orientation has reached. Along with this, every day the newspapers publish grim pictures of mounting tension in rural societies, harrowing tales of atrocities perpetrated against the untouchables, and the bewildered anger of the intelligentsia. One wonders what all this means and what is the way out?

In a letter to A. V. Thakkar, General Secretary of the Anti-untouchability League (later converted into the Harijan Sevak Sangh), Ambedkar suggested an alternative approach. He wanted that rather than dissipating its energies on items like temperance, gymnasiums, cooperation, libraries, schools, etc., the League should concentrate on campaigns to (a) secure civil rights, (b) equality of opportunity and (c) social intercourse. (*What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, B. R. Ambedkar, 1948, pp. 134-40.) One can see the rudiments of a crusader's approach in this letter. Ambedkar complains

that this letter did not evoke any response. It was not even acknowledged. Obviously the crusader s approach did not fit in with Gandhiji's at that time. Perhaps Gandhi thought that it would disrupt national unity in the fight against colonial rule.

Ambedkar refers to another interesting fact. To a group of deputationists who waited on Gandhi requesting him to appoint untouchables on the managing committee of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Gandhi is said to have observed that

> the welfare work for the untouchables is a penance which the Hindus have to do for the sin of untouchability. The money that has been collected has been contributed by the Hindus. From both points of view, the Hindus alone must run the Sangh. Neither ethics nor right would justify the untouchables in claiming a seat on the Board of the Sangh. (Quoted in *What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, B. R. Ambedkar, 1948, p. 142)

It is not clear whether the words are Gandhi's own, but there is no reason to doubt that his stand in the particular context has been correctly stated. What is important is the role assigned to the untouchables in this approach. They are to be the passive objects for the practice of virtue by the caste Hindus. The same orientation seems to underlie most of the non-official organisations working among the untouchables. Even now, very few of them have untouchables in effective positions, in the organs of decision-making. These organisations can more appropriately be characterised as social service organisations, but not voluntary organisations. They are hardly in any position to mobilise the voluntariness of the communities they serve. As a result, along with the development of the communities concerned, a progressive alienation takes place with the organisations which claim to be serving them with State support. Simultaneously, the voluntary mobilisation of the communities run along courses of their own, without State support or without interacting with the wider milieu of the society.

Broadly, the voluntary actions of the untouchables have burst on the Indian scene in two different waves and relate to issues of a differing order. The first wave come in the early fifties. The central issue was the refusal of the untouchables to render

forced services like removal of carcasses, palanquin-bearing and so on. The law was in their favour, but traditional society was not. There were repercussions. The untouchables were subjected to all sorts of harassment. They were boycotted and denied employment opportunities by the owners of land. Sometimes, their houses were burnt; and sometimes they were even physically tortured. There were many local set-backs; but in the long run, the untouchables were successful in asserting their civil rights to a great extent. Even where they continue to render traditional services, there has been a qualitative change. Economic relationship rather than social coercion has been the important determining factor.

The second wave is gaining momentum currently. It relates primarily to the movement of the agricultural labourers and share croppers to establish their rights over the lands cultivated by them. The failure successfully to implement the land reform measures through normal administrative actions has aggravated the situation. As the bulk of the agricultural labourers and share-croppers belong to the untouchable and other castes of low ritual status, the ethnic dimension is added to this movement of the essentially rural proletariat. In some parts of the country, particularly where intensive cultivation and multiple cropping have augmented the employment opportunities of the agricultural labourers, they are also fighting for higher wages. The implementation of a crash employment programme or guaranteed employment programme has also strengthened their hands. The massive assertion of their rights by the mute millions of history has naturally caused consternation among the landlords, rich peasants and other vested interests in rural society. They also find it to their advantage to dilute the socio-economic character of the movement and project it as social arrogance on the part of the untouchables. This helps to mobilise the support of the poorer sections of their own castes and at least to neutralise the castes of the middle ritual status, who are generally small and medium farmers. The rural reaction is on the warpath. Through terrorising the untouchable castes and other poor, it wants to nullify the progressive measures of socio-economic transformation launched by Indira Gandhi. On the other hand, unless the welfare-ameliorative measures and the measures of protective discrimination are linked up with this task of

socio-economic transformation, the stalemate indicated earlier will continue.

But, there are too many diversionary channels for draining out social energy. I was among the untouchable weavers of Sambalpur one night. Four naked sanyasis (mendicants) were performing a yagna (sacrifice) in the darkness. They informed me that they were the worshippers of the void (sunya-devta). The day of the advent of God on earth is near. Rama will accompany him as an archer; the chief of the army has already arrived in the form of a cowboy at Mayurbhanj. When God himself will descend, all the travails of the untouchables will be over. In the meantime, the people are to perform yagnas and feed the sanyasis to hasten the advent of God. They poured ghee (clarified butter) on the sacrificial fire. For a moment, the soul of darkness was chastened; the faces of the people were glowing with hope—and then there was more darkness. I wonder whether the movement initiated by Ambedkar for a mass conversion of the untouchables to Buddhism is not a negation of his negation of the Gandhian orientation towards 'the children of God'. Why did he require the umbrella of God—though it be an umbrella of a different kind? Did he not feel secure enough in the brotherhood of man? Or, was he unwilling to carry the crusade to its logical end? Parallel to the ambivalence of Hindu society as a whole to the question of the untouchables, there is an ambivalence of the untouchable elites to the question of socio-economic transformation. There needs to be a new search for the meaning of all that is happening and not happening.

The main issues arising from what has gone before are:

1. Can there be real improvements in the standard of living of the untouchable castes and can the social disabilities which they suffer from, be removed to a very significant extent, without launching an all out attack on the caste system itself?
2. In the historical structural setting of India, can one get out of the maze of the caste system simply by changing one's religion?
3. In the long-range strategy of removing the stigma of untouchability and various civic and ritual disabilities, to which a vast mass of humanity in the country is subjected, what are the roles of the well-meaning social

liberals and philanthropists on the one hand and the crusaders from among the Scheduled Castes, (as well as others), for their civic rights and for a share in the economic and political power structure of the country, on the other?

4. To what extent have State efforts to improve the conditions of the untouchable castes through constitutional safeguards and concessions promoted or retarded their effective participation in the decision-making process at the various levels of the democratic polity? Besides, what is the impact of such safeguards and concessions on the diversification of the economic pursuits and mobilisation of the social energy of the untouchable castes for progress and national integration?
5. Can the sharpening of class conflict centering on the interests of the landless labourers, marginal farmers and those who by force of tradition or under other forms of compulsion are required to render unclean and/or demeaning services, automatically resolve the caste tangle? Or is it necessary to develop a strategy which will require the mobilisation of the class forces and also the organisation of the platforms of the untouchables and other so-called low castes and link them up in a relationship of minimal internal contradictions, so that the reactionary forces cannot use one against the other?

*Historical Trends**

S A H Haqqi

Caste and its present-day role in Indian social and political life and the future of the caste system are among the grave problems which are agitating the minds of all thinking Indians and engaging the attention of all serious students of Indian politics. Notwithstanding the differences in their approach and/or conclusions, there is a general agreement among them about caste still being a very obtrusive factor of Indian social organisation and an important force in Indian politics.

Caste, says Guy Wint, is 'the grand peculiarity of Hindu society', permeating all Hindu lives, a factor in every situation and a complication in every controversy; it is according to Professor S.C. Dube, 'perhaps the most important single organising principle' in village communities. 'Casteism', says Professor M.N. Srinivas, plays a crucial role in the functioning of representative institutions and in the struggle for power'; he holds it to be 'a powerful barrier against the emotional integration of the people of India'. The problem, however, is not whether one likes or dislikes the caste system or its many and varied manifestations in Indian social and political life (for non-Hindus, too, have developed caste-complexes), but of trying to understand not merely its present-day role in India but also in the India of tomorrow, wherein shall be ensured to 'the people of India' the blessings of justice—social, economic, political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation.

Since we are concerned with the role and the future of the caste system, it would not be inappropriate to say here a few words about caste and the characteristic features of the Indian

*From *Seminar* (70), June 1965.

caste system. Caste, as defined by Sir Edward Blunt, is 'an endogamous group or collection of endogamous groups bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary arising from birth alone, imposing on its members certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse; either

(1) following a common traditional occupation,
(2) claiming a common origin, or
(3) both following such occupation and

claiming such origin, and generally regarded as forming a single homogenous community.' But, according to Shama Sastri, caste means 'social exclusiveness with reference to diet and marriage... birth and rituals are secondary'. The characteristic features of the Indian caste system, as enumerated by Professer G.S. Ghurye, are as follows:

(1) segmental division of society,
(2) hierarchy,
(3) restrictions of feeding and social intercourse,
(4) civil and religious disparities and privileges of the different sections,
(5) lack of unrestricted choice of occupation and
(6) restrictions on marriage.

The caste system, thus, with its occupational and hierarchical differentiations, is an anachronism in a modern democratic State; it does not, and cannot, square well with the concept of an egalitarian society: 'one man, one vote', equality before law, or of opportunity and status. The system implies not merely stratification but also frustration and bitterness arising out of its principles of hierarchy and invidious discriminations concerning privileges and restrictions as regards marriage, social intercourse, choice of occupation, etc. And it is because of this factor alone, if for no other compelling reason, namely, its incompatibility with the concept and the basic structure of a modern, secular, democratic and industrial society, that caste loyalties have weakened and are steadily weakening at a pace which it is easy to sense but hard to define.

This affirmation of mine does not mean that I am unmindful

of or glossing over the rivalry and struggle for power, which one witnesses today (and to which critical references have been made, among others, by M.N. Srinivas, Selig S. Harrison, De Selincourt and Francis L.K. Hsu) between, for instance, the Kammas and the Reddis in Andhra Pradesh, the Okkaligas and the Lingayats in Mysore, the Marathas, the Brahmins and the Makars in Maharashtra, the Patidars, the Banias and Kolis in Gujarat; 'no account of voting behaviour, the legislative proceedings or even ministerial appointments would be complete unless considerable attention were given to this factor', says Professor W. H. Morris-Jones, and not without some justification. But such obtrusive manifestations of caste and casteism as we come across in Indian social and political life are primarily the result of what Myron Weiner has aptly characterised as the politics of scarcity; moreover, centuries-old patterns of thought, behaviour and attitude cannot be discarded or changed overnight or even in the short span of a decade or two. For politics is, as Graham Wallas and Freud pointed out long ago, largely a matter of the subconscious process of habit and instinct, suggestion and imitation.

For a proper understanding of the role of caste today and its future in the developing India, we should, therefore, avoid the mistake of taking a rather mechanistic view of the social and political phenomena; they have to be understood and adjudged in the light of, and against the background of, the socio-economic changes which are now taking place in India, and whose pace is sure to be accelerated as and when the Indian economy reaches the 'take-off' stage.

The caste system had its origin and rationale in the unchanging nature of the self-sufficient village community. 'We must not forget', as Marx pointed out, 'that these little (Indian) communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social State into never-changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalising worship of nature'. 'Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down', wrote the ardent admirer of the village panchayats, Metcalfe, 'revolution succeeds to revolution. Hindu, Pathan, Mogul, Maratha, Sikh, English are all masters in turn but the village communities remain the same'. But much water has flown down the Ganges

since Marx and Metcalfe wrote: the 'Unchanging East' has begun to change and, during the decade or so since Independence, the Indian social and economic structure has undergone more changes than took place in centuries before it, each and every one of them being, in the Indian context, radical in its character and revolutionary in its effect: the abolition of Zamindari and Jagirdari, legislation concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance among the Hindus, imposition of the Estate Duty, ceiling on landed property, consolidation of land holdings and ancillary land reforms, adoption of a democratic constitution, etc.

Besides, the 'splendid isolation' and 'independence' enjoyed by the village communities during the ancient and medieval times is, thanks to the development of road transport and the growth in education and mass communication, yielding place to busy and intimate intercourse between the city-dwellers and those living in the rural areas. The twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation have brought the towns and villages nearer to each other and shaken the complacence of traditional modes of village life and, as Professor S. C. Dube says, 'the widening world of the villagers has had a marked influence on raising their level of expectation and aspiration'. For, to quote Robert I Crane,

> the city acts as a centre of new ideas and of new experiences as well as of a new freedom from customary controls and beliefs. Going back to the village, the peasant carries elements of an 'urban' intellectual ferment and disseminates this ferment among those who have remained tied to the soil.

There has thus, occurred a two-pronged attack on the enviromental setting wherein the caste system had its origin, growth and sway: the villagers, on the one hand, moving or migrating to urban centres and there getting contaminated by new ideas, attitudes and practices and, on the other, the forces of modernisation penetrating the villages and changing the proverbial patience of the Indian into one of unrest and anger. 'People are no longer content to accept their station in life but', as Professor Humayun Kabir says, 'challenge the position in which they find themselves. In place of the old acceptance of

fate and contentment with one's condition, there is a spirit of rebelliousness astir in the land.'

The contact of the villagers with the town-dwellers, the growth of industrial towns, and the development of a new civilisation centering round the cities could not but affect social mobility and taboos concerning food and social intercourse. As Professor Ghurye pointed out in the thirties,

> the exigencies of office work have forced city people to put aside the old ideas of purity. Caste-Hindus have to eat articles of food prepared by Christians, Musalmans, or Persians, because Hindu restaurants have not been easily or equally accessible during office hours. In Hindu hotels, they have to take their meals in the company of people of almost any caste—as the hotel keeper cannot manage to reserve accommodation for members of different castes. What was originally done under pressure of necessity has become a matter of routine with many in their city life.

The erosion of ~~rituals and~~ taboos governing the preparation and consumption of food has, with the passage of time, gained further momentum and inter-caste and even inter-communal dining has now become quite common, particularly among the educated and in the towns.

The forces of modernisation and westernisation have, thus, been in diverse ways instrumental in loosening and weakening the hold of the age-old values, traditions and taboos governing and regulating the very basis of Indian social life: the individual's place in society and human relations within the society. The impact of western ideas and institutions on Indian life and thought has been both deep and wide, shaking up the very foundations of our hierarchical and patriarchical society and inspiring and encouraging instead thereof, the growth of secular nationalism and an egalitarian society based on contractual relationships. It has also fostered among the Indian people the urge and the desire for a better life, not in the hereafter, but in this world, here and now, obliging or inducing them to seek new avenues of economic advancement, to take to new trades or occupations in the hope and desire of greater financial rewards. The industrial revolution, which brought about a complete and

radical change in the material conditions of life in the West could not but adversely affect the bases of the Indian economic structure, namely, handicrafts and small-scale farming, giving rise to a new class of proletariat and landless peasantry in search of 'fresh fields and pastures new'.

The result of all these developments was, as, for instance, noted by Daniel H. Buchanan (*The Development of Capitalist Enterprises in India*), Radha Kamal Mukherjee (*The Indian Working Class*), Bernard S. Cohn and others (*Village India : Studies in the Little Community*), increase in social mobility, decline in craft-exclusiveness and the emergence of a new middle class drawn, as Kingsley Davis (*The Population of India and Pakistan*) says, from all castes, 'some more than others to be sure, but certainly from no particular caste'. The inter-caste tensions survey conducted by Professor Mukherjee and his associates has shown, for instance, that in the factories of Kanpur, 90 per cent of the unskilled workers, 24 per cent of the semi-skilled and 13 per cent of the skilled workers were drawn from the lower castes. On the basis of his study of the Indian Census Reports of 1921 and 1941, Kingsley Davis prepared the following table showing the percentages of persons who were still engaged in their traditional occupations, which also incidentally indicates the pace and the extent of social mobility in India within the period under review:

Traditional Occupations	*Per cent*
Agricultural	21
Pastoral	20
Labourers and Village menials	14
Dealers in Food and Drink	37
Learned Professions	20
Boating and Fishing	9
Trade and Industry (unspecified)	70
Trade and Industry (specified)	51

This social mobility is not a phenomenon either wholly new or totally unfamiliar in the history of the Indian people. Indian society has not been so static as is commonly believed; in days gone by, social mobility took place under the cloak of what has been termed 'sanskritization' but, of course, at a slow and even

unsteady pace. What is, therefore, new and significant today is that social mobility is taking place at a quickened pace and as a matter of routine; even inter-caste marriages are now taking place without any one making much fuss about the same. Dr. C. T. Kannan (*Inter-Caste and Inter-Community Marriages in India*) says:

> Just twenty-five years ago the instances of inter-caste marriage were very few; and those individuals who dared to marry outside the caste had to undergo truly great hardships. Today the situation is altogether different. Not only has the prevalence of inter-caste marriage become more considerable, but even the difficulties the inter-caste marriage couples have to face have become comparatively quite mild. With the spread of higher education both among the males and females, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages find greater favour amongst the younger generation. Indeed, one could safely assert that the graph of inter-caste marriages is steadily rising, never becoming a plateau, much less declining....It would not, therefore, be wrong to conclude that caste barriers are being more and more ignored in Hindu marriages today and caste would not be an important consideration in the Hindu marriage tomorrow.

The bases of Indian social life and economy are, thus, being gradually but radically altered and the old caste-bound and tradition-ridden India is being slowly transformed into a modern, dynamic nation inspired by the ideals of social justice and a richer life for all its citizens without any distinction of race, caste, creed, sex or place of birth. But the problem of problems is that India has been the melting-pot of races and religions where the absence of cultural homogeneity and lack of enough social mobility tend to perpetuate, and even accentuate, social differences and tensions. We in India have not, therefore, so far had that 'emotional fusion and exaggeration of two very old phenomena—nationality and patriotism', which, as Professor J. H. Hayes has pointed out, constitute the bedrock of modern nationalism. The structure of Indian society has consequently remained, in the words of Jitendra Singh,

> largely 'communal' (ascriptive, traditional, feudal). The

characteristic of a 'communal society' is that it stratified into closed groups with well-defined (but circumscribed) relationships. They are bound together by a certain standard of behaviour which is conventional and based solely on kinship and community ties. This standard provides them with a sense of belongingness but also keeps them rooted to their segregated groups. They are, consequently, aware of very few alternatives and their field of choice is limited. The individual has neither status nor rights apart from his group life. Authority is highly personal and is exemplified by the subordinate's deferential attitude toward his superior. It is a society of male dominance in which age is venerated for its own sake.

It is because of this 'communal' character of Indian social life, the under-developed economy, and the consequent gap between levels of aspiration and fulfilment that there still exist and prevail, quite obstrusively too, narrow sectional loyalties based on caste, creed and region. The revolution of rising expectations has made people clamour more and more for worldly goods while the adoption of a democratic constitution (with adult franchise and periodic elections) has made the masses aware of their rights and power in a democracy.

'Economic grievances' and 'egalitarian movements', as shown by inter-caste tension surveys, have been responsible for converting casteism from a social into a political force, more or less on the pattern of a pressure group, particularly in the case of the lower castes who are no longer prepared to accept or tolerate the age-long dominance and monopoly of higher castes in the social and cultural life of India. The emergence and growth of political parties and interest groups is, however, but natural and inevitable in a democracy: the political parties constitute, as Sigmund Neuman has said, 'the lifeline of modern politics' while the interest groups are the means or instruments employed by the different 'community-minded' groups to safeguard and promote what they regard as their legitimate interests. Moreover, the caste associations, as pointed out by some foreign observers,

bring political democracy to Indian villages through the familiar and accepted institutions of caste. In the process it is

> changing the meaning of caste. By creating conditions in which a caste's significance and power is beginning to depend on its numbers, rather than its ritual and social status, and by encouraging egalitarian aspirations among its members, the caste association is exerting a liberating influence.

Recent election studies also show that though caste is an important factor at the village and district levels, 'grouping on a caste basis is growing weaker while alignment on a wider political basis is growing stronger'.

Indian politics is becoming more and more pragmatic with economic and political issues demanding greater attention than had been the case during the first two general elections. The political parties, to go by their programmes and manifestos, are more or less committed to a 'socialist' programme, advocating justice, liberty, equality and fraternity with a view to assure the dignity of the individual, irrespective of his faith or status; moreover, the parties generally cut across the lines dividing people on the bases of caste and creed, inculcating among their members a wider and more catholic outlook.

Inter-caste marriages, coeducational institutions, hostels and social gatherings, the legal abolition of untouchability, and all forms of discrimination based on the accidents of birth, status or sex, the programmes of mass education, and Community Development are all playing an important role in training the citizens of tomorrow for a healthy, normal social relationship. They also help in welding the different groups and sections of our people into a modern society, providing a more abundant life for all its members wherein would be for every Indian's taking, to borrow a phrase or two from Julian Huxley, 'the daring speculations, and aspiring ideals of men long dead, the organized knowledge of science, the hoary wisdom of the ancients, the creative imaginings of all the world's poets and artists'.

*Facts and the Future**

T N MADAN

There should be no doubt about the contention that many types of modern scholarship were alien to India when they first arrived here through the medium of the English language and as a result of the system of education envisaged and initiated by Macaulay. Sociology certainly was one such scholarly study. But what was given with one hand was often almost taken away with the other; the sociological understanding of many Indian institutions and groupings has been prejudiced and destroyed by the use of English words to designate Indian social phenomena which do not exactly correspond to their supposed English equivalents. The study of village social structure in India has yet to be extricated from this terminological muddle. We are still debating 'what should we mean by Caste?' (E.R. Leach, 1960); 'Is the Brahmanic gotra a grouping of kin?' (T.N. Madan, 1962); whether 'the basic terms and concepts for the study of the family In India' are adequate and clearly defined (A.M. Shah, 1964); and so forth.

The word 'village' itself needs clarification. It does not mean in India exactly the same as it does in England, nor is its historical evolution comparable to that of the English village. English observers of Indian rural life, such as L.S.S. O'Malley, have written that the Indian village corresponds to the English parish in as much as it includes not only 'the inhabited site with its cluster of houses and buildings', but also the surrounding land, whether under cultivation or pasturage, or lying waste. The Indian village has been traced back to the Vedic times, and so has been its communal character (using the word 'communal' in its dictionary meaning). Sir Henry Sumner Maine, the distinguished Victorian historian of village communities in the East and West,

*From *Seminar* (70), June 1965.

described it as 'the least destructible institution of a society which never willingly surrenders any one of its usages to innovation' (*Ancient Law*, 1891). But he wrongly believed the communal or joint village to be representative of the whole country. B.H. Baden-Powell (of the Boy Scouts movement fame) pointed out in *The Indian Village Community* (1896) that 'taking the widest possible view of the subject, two types of village must be recognized—one that has, and one that has not, any appearance of joint or common ownership'. The latter he labelled as the 'raiyatwari' and, later, the 'severalty', village; he also distinguished between joint villages of a tribal character and those which can be traced back to an individual founder or to voluntary association.

I will not go into greater details about village tenures, which are in any case very well-known, but will only add that: (i) the village panchayat seems to have been an institution peculiar to the joint village; and (ii) the 'raiyatwari' village, based upon the principle of separate ownership, is so much more prevalent in the country that it may well be called the representative type of village community. Our understanding of the nature and functioning of village life in India has not only been prejudiced by the use of certain English terms, but has also been obscured by the romanticism of nationalist historians. Thus, many idyllic elegies have been written about the destruction of the self-sufficient 'village republics' as a consequence of British rule. That the Indian villages were more self-sufficient before the onset of industrialisation than they are now would be idle to deny; that the colonial situation must rest upon the bedrock of economic exploitation of the colony's raw materials is a well-established historico-economic fact. But the general trend in sociological thinking today is against the applicability of the notion of the self-sufficient 'primitive isolate' to peasant communities—such as the villages of India—which partake of a civilised tradition.

Peasant society has been aptly described as the rural dimension of civilisation. Unless rural India has changed beyond recognition in the last 200 years or so, it seems extremely unlikely—I would say impossible—that the villages could have been self-contained and self-sufficient. The reasons are many. The political history of the country does not support the theory of little republics; nor do such widespread religious observances as

pilgrimages, or social customs as exogamy (i.e., marriage outside one's own kindred), which often drives a family to seek spouses outside its own village, give credence to it. But the most imporant argument against the notion of the self-sufficiency and self-containment of the Indian village is the caste system. The caste ethic precludes the followers of a certain hereditary occupation (say, the priests) from engaging in certain other occupations (such as that of barbers or potters) which are, however, essential for the maintenance of social life. Now it is conceivable in theory that a village may harbour within itself all the essential occupational groups; but an examination of census reports and the many extant village studies reveals that generally a village is unable to provide itself with the services of all the 'specialist' castes and is dependent upon neighbouring villages for the same.

To take a few examples only: Sherupur in the Faizabad District of Uttar Pradesh (studied by the American anthropologist, H.A. Gould), with a population of, 228, lacks washermen, potters, carpenters, barbers, etc. Thyagasamuthiram in the Tanjore District of Madras (studied by the Norwegian anthropologist, D. Sivertsen), with a population of 786, lacks washermen, potters, weavers, tailors, etc. And in Ramkheri in the Dewas District of Madhya Pradesh (studied by the British anthropologist, A.C. Mayer), with a population of 912, there are no washermen. The argument may well be clinched by pointing out that, in the traditional rural society, far more general and socially significant than the village panchayat has been the caste panchayat with its jurisdiction spread over several adjacent villages.

Caste, the institution of central importance in the Indian village social structure, is not specialised in character but represents a whole scheme of life. The caste system is truly a synonym for Hindu society. It has attracted the interest of numerous scholars from India and abroad, and yet we have only just begun, in the last two decades or so, to arrive at an adequate understanding of its working on the basis of intensive fieldwork. Formerly, many thinkers, some brilliant and others muddled, contributed their theories, but these were based on inadequate data. Some of these theories, however, have enjoyed tremendous vogue. Thus, caste has been for long held responsible for breaking up Hindu society into small kin-groups and precluding the

growth of cooperative ways of life in Indian villages. The late K.M. Panikkar, an influential and prolific writer, held this view, but for a classic statement of it, we may go back to Bougle, a French scholar, who wrote in 1908,

> When we say that the spirit of caste reigns in a society, we mean that the different groups of which that society is composed repel each other rather than attract, that each retires within itself, isolates itself, makes every effort to prevent its members from contracting alliances or even from entering into relations with neighbouring groups....

Well said, one might exclaim, but then how has such a society survived over the centuries?

A society which denies complete freedom in the choice of occupations to the community as a whole, cannot survive unless there is economic cooperation, howsoever limited, between various occupational groups. Writers—and their number is considerable—who have (over) emphasised the divisions within the Indian village community have failed to take note of the inevitability of economic cooperation. It was an American missionary, William Wiser, who drew attention to the magnitude of such inter-caste ties in his book, *The Jajmani System* (1936). Wiser, it seems in retrospect, leaned much too much to the other side, but the importance of what he showed cannot be overestimated. The latest research on Jajmani relations has reached a level of sophistication where it is possible to discern between economic and ritual necessity, and to show that the very notion of ritual pollution which divides groups also makes cooperation between them imperative, even when the economic content of such transactions is not the principal consideration. What makes a barber cling to his rich patron, say, the Brahmin landlord, is economic necessity; but what makes a Brahmin family, even though poor, retain the services of a barber family is ritual necessity; for Brahmins, the shaving of hair and beard are, on many occasions, not acts of masculine toilette, but of ritual purification.

Another widespread misconception about the caste system is its absolute rigidity and unchangeability. It is undoubtedly true that a person is born into a caste; that he can do nothing to change his caste membership; that (in other words) caste

membership is ascribed and not achieved. This does not, however, entail the conclusion that a caste as a whole cannot improve its social status. In fact, castes have been known to do so, and one of the best-known mechanisms for achieving this is that of social inclusion-exclusion; that is, the group desirous of improving its status tries, through overt behaviour, to include itself along with those groups whose status is higher and to exclude itself from its actual peers.

Such attempts (described for Mysore by M.N. Srinivas and for Orissa by F.G. Bailey) often follow an improvement in the economic position of the concerned caste, and usually succeed unless it tries to move upwards across such an insurmountable barrier as the line of pollution. But even in such cases, upward mobility can, and does, find other expressions. Denied the desired social status within the traditional social system, an ambitious group may endeavour to repudiate that system altogether and, as Bailey and others have shown, seek its rights, not as a caste within the Indian caste system, but as citizenry within the Indian nation. Low caste people try to step out of the traditional social system when it holds no hope for them. But those castes, or sections of castes, which succeed in rising upwards, pose a challenge to their superiors. The narrowing of the gap between the high and the low can hardly be expected to appeal to those used to enjoying the privileges of high status; so they too turn their backs on the old system and go in for modernisation in a (vain) bid to maintain the social differentiation within the village community. Gould has shown that, taking percentages, it is the upper castes of the village of Sherupur who send out more migrants into urban areas than the poor and the lowly castes.

What is the significance of the foregoing for the future of Indian village communities? To answer this question we must bear in mind two developments of great consequence which have occurred in India since 1947. These are: (i) widespread land reforms and (ii) the introduction of universal adult franchise by secret ballot. The land reforms have helped to improve the economic condition of a widespread class of peasant proprietors; adult franchise has placed political power, or at least the ability to influence its exercise, in their hands; and the secret ballot, by providing the necessary anonymity,

has made it possible that this power will be exercised by this 'new class', and, what is more important, against the traditional leaders of the countryside. The significance of the foregoing statement is that, since traditional leadership in a region is associated with a certain caste (such as the Thakur in eastern Uttar Pradesh or the Brahmin in Kashmir Valley), modern political processes are being employed to settle old scores between castes. It is in this sense that caste may be said to have adapted itself to the new politico-economic situation in the country and not dissolved in it. The emergence of caste associations is to be understood in this context.

Social anthropologists have often been accused by political scientists and other commentators of providing support to a tottering institution—caste in India—by taking a morbid interest in its vitality. This is not quite fair because, first some anthropologists (notably Edmund Leach of Cambridge and Kathleen Gough from the USA) have maintained that the competition between castes for political and economic power does amount to a breach of the caste ideology; second, even those of us who do not accept the foregoing as implying the dissolution of caste, have made it clear that (i) caste in India today is not the same as it was a hundred years ago, and (ii) caste is one powerful, but no means the sole factor in political decision-making in India today. Srinivas has succinctly stated that although, taking India as a whole, there has been a distinct weakening of the ritual and social functions of caste in recent decades, 'there is indeed a wide gulf between caste as an endogamous and ritual unit, and the caste like units which are so active in politics and administration in modern India' (*Caste in Modern India and other Essays*).

To put it briefly, the role of caste in rural India needs watching as it has still a lot of life in it: endogamy (i.e., marriage within one's own caste) is still widely prevelent. People today are possibly less likely to follow parental occupations than before; and less keen on observing rules of purity and pollution than before; but so long as endogamy survives, castes survive; and there are old scores to settle. Caste has changed its meaning—and its strategy—but is still very strong in village life.

There is a ferment in rural India today and the Government is trying to nourish it and channelise it through its much publicised Community Development and Panchayati Raj

programmes. The whole country is now covered by over 5,000 Community Development Blocks, and a lot of work has been and is being done. There has been waste, inefficiency, lack of understanding and cooperation; but there has also been considerable success. People have begun to want things, to want change, and this in itself is no mean achievement. As Toynbee, the distinguished British historian has put it, the Community Development programme is one huge effort to wake up the long asleep Rip Van Winkle—the Indian peasantry. The Panchayati Raj programme, however, has yet not got through its teething troubles.

I possibly cannot go into the details of these programmes here; much less into an assessment of the same. My comment will be confined to focusing attention on a basic source of frustration—on a kind of contradiction in our objectives. On the one hand, we want to change our countryside; the future that beckons is in the minds of the educated city-dwelling elites; the villager has no idea of it other than what percolates down to him through inadequate and clogged channels of communication. (Several years ago I saw a Health Ministry documentary on family planning being shown to a labour colony somewhere in Uttar Pradesh. The use of contraceptives was explained with the help of Venetian blinds letting in sunshine into a room and cutting it out. The Ministry should have first installed these blinds in the slums before wasting the labourer's time.)

We want to change the unchanging villages, and change them quickly. On the other hand, we want to do this with the consent of the people. And the people, if you ask them, may not want what you want to give them; or they may want what you cannot or will not give them. They may want the tea-house or (as Kusum Nair and the Chittur B.D.O. discovered) an aerodrome. The result is a breakdown. The complaint that the Indian villager is apathetic has been heard so often that it hardly needs repetition. What is needed is an attempt to find out why he is apathetic. And what is needed even more is to ask the fundamental question as to whether we want quick tangible change, or change with the consent of the people of rural India. If the latter (as seems to be the decision), then the path into the future is long and weary and there will be obstacles and frustrations in plenty along the way.

*Hindu Values: Myth and Reality**

M K HALDAR

Thanks to a type of Indology which follows from Max Weber's characterisation of Hindu civilisation, there is a belief that the Indians since the days of yore have given one particular answer to the question 'what should I set out to achieve'? and that answer is: *moksha*. It has also been held that this view of the aim of life is based on a special type of metaphysical doctrine which treats the world known through the five senses and the intellect as the product of a sort of cosmic illusion traditionally known as *maya*. It is further held that the golden way to snap the snare of this cosmic illusion is through a rigorous practice of a course of world and life negation, the life of an ascetic, which enjoins us to deny all worldly pleasures, especially the pleasures of love and sex and asks us to concentrate our consciousness on the indefinable Absolute so that our souls may attain oneness with something accessible only through *bodhi*, *pragyan* or some such incommunicable and nugatory state. When we want to discuss the traditional values in India, we should first try to travel from the field of mythology and legend to the field of history. We should ask whether throughout history Indians recognised *moksha* or *nirvana* (it is unnecessary here to go into the Talmidistic differences between *moksha*, and *nirvana*) to be the most desirable end of life or not? Indian history between the days of the Harappan civilisation and the Asokan empire poses almost an insurmountable difficulty. We do not find any substantial primary historical evidences of this period. What scholars have done is a conjectural reconstruction from literary material,which was written much later.

*From *Seminar* (64), December 1964.

From the archaeological evidences of the Harappan culture, it is difficult to ascertain what exactly the Harappan people thought about the aims of life. But from the meticulous care with which they built their cities, we would not be completely off the track if we thought that they took life on this earth seriously and tried to make it worth living. That the early Rig Vedic Indians enjoyed living is an acknowledged fact by all Indologists. The Rig Vedic Indians were a war-like people, who enjoyed their drinks and beef. They were not ascetics (though we get some reference to their knowledge of ascetics) and neither did they think that the ideal of world and life negation was a worthwhile pursuit.

The authentic and continuous history of India based on primary historical sources begins with the days of Asoka. From his edicts and inscriptions, it is evident that *dharma* was not inextricably bound with the ideal of *moksha* or *nirvana*. If *nirvana* was the key concept of the Hindu religion or of Buddhism of the days of Asoka, we would have found the word in his inscriptions.

> The virtues that Asoka desired to inculcate among his subjects were the following as referred to again and again in one or other of the Inscriptions, viz., mercifulness towards all living beings; charities and gifts to Brahmans, ascetics, friends, relatives and acquaintances, truthfulness, purity of thought, honesty, gentleness, gratitude, self-restraint, steadfastness, non-injury to animal life and fear of sin; moderation in spending and ownership; respectfulness towards parents, elders and teachers; proper behaviour towards Brahmans, ascetics, relatives, servants and slaves; avoidance of ferocity, cruelty, anger, pride and envy; exertion in good works; relieving the sufferings of the aged, the indigent and the sick, the toleration of and respectfulness towards other's faith; avoidance of meaningless rituals; avoidance of sectarian bigotry, etc. (*Asoka's Edicts* by Amulyachandra Sen, pp. 33-4)

It is also significant to note that Asoka talks of heaven and not of *nirvana*; he talks of an afterworld and not of rebirth.

> His conception of religion (*dharma*)...is not of the sentimental,

> emotional, ritualistic or even of the metaphysical or meditative type but is essentially of an active, humanitarian and benevolent character, viz., to be good and to do good to others. The road to heaven recommended by him is not renunciation although with great wisdom he advises 'spending little and owning little'. (Ibid., p. 34)

It is significant to note that Asoka was not against all types of war. He declared himself against wars of conquest. It should also be mentioned that in the Asokan times the ascetics were held in esteem; but nowhere did Asoka suggest that their life was worth following in so far as the common people were concerned. This latent ambivalence between the ascetic ideal and the ideal of Asoka had profound influence on the later-day Indian view of life.

Our history for the next several centuries after the days of Asoka has enough evidence to show that, for a considerable time, the vigour of the Indian people was not lost in the quest for nebulous *nirvana* or *moksha*. The literature, art, science and history of this period are mostly concerned with the so-called mundane life of ours, even though the ascetics continued to be respected. To say that the Indians started sliding down the path of world and life negation with the eclipse of Buddhism is not history. Until the seventh or eighth century A.D., we find that we were second to none in the fields of literature, science and art.

It may, however, be pointed out here that the Indians seldom evinced a tragic sense of life. The absence of any tragedy, barring the exception of one one-act play, in the vast corpus of Sanskrit literature is something to be considered seriously. It seems to me that decadence in Indian civilisation began with the rise of Sankaracharya and the Islamic invasions. In the field of philosophy and metaphysics, the rise of Sankar, who had scanty knowledge of the positive sciences known to the Indians, heralded the decadence in Indian civilisation from which it has not as yet been able to extricate itself. Whatever evidence we have of occasional attempts to find a breakthrough were lost in the wilderness of the ideal of *moksha*. The last such attempt was by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. It is significant to note that Sankar, acknowledged to be the greatest philosopher of all ages by

the Indians, did not even know the role of the father in biological creation. His greatness as a metaphysician remains unchallenged by the Indian thinkers of today. Even a cursory perusal of the proceedings of the Indian Philosophical Congress will dispel all the doubts of a sceptic in this regard. Surprisingly enough, this continues to be the fact even when the major portion of the curriculum of philosophy in the Indian universities is concerned with the development of philosophical thought in western countries.

The attitude of most Indian intellectuals continues to be the same as that observed by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in the middle of the nineteenth century. He wrote:

> Any idea when brought to them (the Indian pandits) whether in the form of a new truth or in the form of the expansion of truths, the germs of which their Shastras contain, they will not accept. . . . Lately a feeling is manifest among the learned of this part of India, specially in Calcutta and its neighbourhood, that when they hear of a scientific truth the germs of which may be traced out in their Shastras, instead of showing any regard for that truth, they triumph and the superstitious regard for their own Shastras is redoubled.

Further, they (the pandits of India) believe that their Shastras have all emanated from omniscient Rishis and, therefore, they cannot but be infallible. When in the way of discussion or in the course of conversation any truth advanced by European science is presented before them, the tendency is to ridicule them.

These learned pandits of India with their supporters in the western countries have given us an impression that worldly life was despised and secular activities condemned by Indians in all ages. This is a very popular view with most intellectuals who seldom take the trouble to probe deeper into the history and civilisation of India, so much so, that the positive, materialistic, secular, energistic and allied institutions and theories of the Indian people have often been left completely unnoticed. And this, despite the thousand and one wars of Indian history as well as the million instances of sensuality, luxury and corruption prevailing in the Indian society, as in the West, through the ages.

We readily neglect the vast corpus of literature bearing on bloodshed, sex life, economic prosperity, domestic bliss, etc., think that the Indians never thought of this world, never thought of the human being in the concrete, and declare that some type of belief in a pseudo-mystic transcendent reality was the only thing with which the Indians of the past were concerned. Even the wisdom of ancient India gets mutilated in the hands of our contemporaries. A half-hearted mysticism justifying India's failure to face life squarely leads the Indian intellectual to a sphere where the individual human being loses his significance in the mumbo-jumbo of a sham mysticism.

The deep-rooted apathy towards change and development (this may have some relation to the Hindu idea of change: change, according to the Hindus, is cynical and in the ultimate analysis, according to the most influential Indian schools of thought is either an illusion or an appearance) born out of frustration and the certificates that the pseudo-intellectuals gets from their fellow-travellers in the West have jointly created a world of make-believe. To them, the truths have been discovered once and for all by the ancient seers. There is no need to realise them progressively through diverse social, economic and cultural activities. Even the patterns of all future activities of men have been set by the ancient thinkers and social mores.

Against any independent pursuit of knowledge, especially in the field of sociology, the humanities and technological development, there is the inevitable reply that the Indians must toe the line set by the ancient seers. Thus, Indian spiritualism of which we are so proud preserves a narrow and conservative form of escapism from concrete responsibilities. Buddhist compassion has become a pretext for not practising justice which must precede all charity. And tolerance has become identical with a cloying paternalistic indulgence. This paternalistic indulgence is reinforced by the concept of *dharma* entertained by an Indian. Value in the sense of free choice from among alternatives seems to be completely out of place in the concept of *dharma* as it is or was understood by the Indians of today or of the past one thousand years or so. Indeed, the Indians' excessive preoccupation with *dharma* may well work to blunt their appreciation of what the value of human choice may be all about.

The life of the average Hindu is governed by what is stated in

the *Dharma Shastras* and the *Panjikas* and not by what the ill-informed scholar wants to impress upon us to be the *dharma*. Even a cursory perusal of the *Panjika* will convince the unwary that every minute detail of a Hindu's life is governed by rules. There are rules for eating brinjals on a particular day and avoiding the same on another day. The days on which a husband should not go to his wife are also stated there. The concept of morality is circumscribed by the rules stated in the *Dharma Shastras* and the *Panjika* as interpreted through a philosophy of world and life negation. That is why an Indian can be perfectly acceptable to the society even if he is corrupt in his official work. There is a convenient hiatus between what he thinks and what he does. He does not try to find the solution of his moral predicament in a moral adventure even if any such thing occurs to his mind.

If he is able to compromise his knowledge from the West with his superstitious belief, he often goes to a Guru or Baba or Ma, who looks after the well-being of his tormented self. The rise of the innumerable Babas and Mas and their immense popularity even in the so-called sophisticated circles is significant. I am told on reliable authority that university professors, high government officials and even Ministers have their Babas and astrologers. The English-educated go to the Babas and Mas to find an escape route from self-torture and suffering. But for the ordinary Indian, the escape route from such predicaments has also been given by the Shastras. In the ultimate analysis, he can renounce the world and become a *sanyasi*. A *sanyasi* is not governed by the social codes. Thus, a view of world and life negation permeates the outlook of the average Indian. Every Indian, however crudely he may be attached to his material possessions, dreams and talks of the time when he will renounce the world and become a *sanyasi* as soon as he is able to settle the affairs of his family which, incidentally, he seldom settles to his own satisfaction. This yearning for making good in the next life is further strengthened by his excessive preoccupation with death and death rites.

No matter if time and again Indians have dismissed life as mere illusion—the product of that inexpressible cosmic power, *maya*—I still think that they are most stubbornly and crudely attached to life. Does the way they wail after the death of

someone dear to them show that they seriously consider this life to be the product of *maya*—baseless fabric of fancy? Take a look at the ever-recurring role of *Sapinda* (one who has the right to offer *pindas* to a departed soul is a *Sapinda* of the dead man) in our life. For instance, if one wants to marry as a good Hindu, one must take account of one's *Sapindaship*; if one desires that one's soul be liberated, one must pay obeisance to one's ancestors as a *Sapinda*; if one wants to lay claim on inheritance, one must establish one's Sapindaship, and so on and so forth. All this is included in the Hindu concept of *dharma*. The vast corpus of literature known as the *Dharma Shastras* gives us the guide lines of the minutest detail of a Hindu's day to day life. There are set codes of individual, social and ritualistic behaviours. And there are also codes for absolving oneself from the sin which one may commit by infringing upon a rule or a set of rules. As a result, the Hindu scheme of life is characterised by an absence of ethics. Only axiology and casuistry reign supreme there.

With the impact of the West on India, a new awareness of values and society was ushered in at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But this awareness was completely lost in the welter of extreme politicalisation of the Indian intellectuals. Gradually, intellectual pursuit and discernment were jettisoned in the name of the 'inner voice'. Western impact has up till now failed to stir the depths of the Indian intellectuals, not to speak of the average Indians who continue to live in their age-old 'protoplasmic apathy'. The short-lived euphoria as a result of the western impact is tending to disillusionment, frustration and cynicism. In the case of most of the intellectuals and politicians, it has left only a new dimension—the dimension of hypocrisy and intellectual dishonesty. The transfer of power to Indian hands, instead of arousing the Indian intellectuals from their stupor, lulled most of them back into a still deeper stupor of trying to gain official patronage by means fair or foul. They are too eager to take their vendetta on the western intellectuals, very often on imaginary grounds. The lure of official patronage often masquerades as the fundamental unity and emotional integration of India. To rub out the rugged edges of their spiritual bankruptcy, many Indian intellectuals entertain some make-believe picture of India and use it as a sort of spiritual sand-paper.

Whatever the reason, a sort of persecution mania seems to have taken hold of many of the Indian intellectuals. Under such a situation, a large measure of conservative conformism can easily be discerned. Power has become the cornerstone of goodness. The collective will is assumed to be transmitted by some process of osmosis to the ruling clique, which supposedly governs for the individual's good. Indian intellectuals seem to have forgotten that true individuality lies in our power to exercise our judgements to the best of our discretion.

The attitude of frustrated escapism is a swing to the other extreme. It represents a move from the infra-red of collectivism and conformism to the ultra-violet of egocentric particularism. In the name of the collective and of the social good, the conservative conformist is often too prone to sacrifice the individual. In his zeal to bring an omnibus solution to all human problems, he tends to hypostatise the collective and the social and forgets Henry George's warning:

> Social reform is not to be secured by noise or shouting, by complaints and denunciations, by the formation of parties or the making of revolution; but by awakening of thoughts and progress of ideas! Until there be correct thought there cannot be right action and when there is correct thought right action will follow.

The conservative thinkers want us to stop thinking. And the anarcho-escapists suggest that our thoughts should never be translated into social realities. Consequent to all this, after an initial euphoria, Indian architecture following the monstrosity created by Le Corbusier in Chandigarh has acquired an air of unreality; Indian films and film music give us aping versions of Hollywood; painting is chewing either the ancient Indian or the late nineteenth century French cud; and literature mostly sings the glory of the politically powerful or is a mutilated version of some stale craze in the West.

In short, most of the Indians are living in a hermetic world of abstractions, blueprint, paper resolutions and make-believe, or are busy in cashing in on India's poverty while feeling that all nations which help us should be obliged to us for giving them an opportunity to do so. But so far as we ourselves are concerned,

there is no need for us to feel obliged to anyone, as that may militate against our principle of all-out nonalignment. For the development of any significant number of enterprising men it is, however, essential that the channels of communication between men be free and unhampered. For the last several centuries, these channels in India have been mostly monopolised in a very subtle and clever way by the caste and ascetic hierarchy. It has been done so subtly that it is very difficult to find out where exactly the centre of this monopoly lies.

Through an almost imperceptible process of indoctrination, and by the preservation of a sham purity of knowledge, ideas, and peoples, the leaders of the Hindu society have made the average Hindu completely impervious to values. The Hindu thinks that obedience is essential for social organisation. All decisions are made for him by his elders, spiritual or chronological, who always know what is good for the young and 'inferior'. To think that the contemporary Indian's reverence for the politically powerful is a release from 'purely traditional faith' and that this 'is essential for the development of a healthy scheme of values' is a travesty of reason. The ordinary Indian bestows respect on the powerful.

Even a cursory survey of the causes for the reverence for the Babas and Mas and astrologers will convince us that the average Indian does not respect them for any spiritual upliftment. He respects them for very mundane reasons—for getting promotions in his job, for being successful in business, for curing his diseases and so on and so forth. Today he is finding that he can be more benefited by the politically powerful and that is why he has developed a reverence for them. There is hardly any latent appreciation of values in this. There is a tendency to entrench the above more firmly in the Indian society because of the type of centralised planning which the Government of India with its zeal for that nebulous concept, 'socialistic pattern of society', is trying to pursue. Our politicians and intellectuals who dance to the tune set by the politicians tend to forget that planning is necessary, but over-planning is disastrous for the growth of the individual. It would be preposterous to think that the Indian civilisation did not unfold itself through planned growth. As a matter of fact, the decadence in Indian civilisation started from the time when we began to think in terms of over-planning. We

failed to strike a healthy balance between social planning and individual development—a thing of which the ancient Indians were capable.

The tendency to chalk out a national policy of education and of such other cultural affairs reflects the cult of illiteracy ascendent in contemporary India. It is not for naught that some contemporary thinkers appreciate the fairly obvious analogy between the pretensions of modern historicistic social scientists and the age-old desire for omniscience manifest in astrological practices.

*Western Impact on Indian Values**

A K SARAN

The British conquest of India was, in many ways, unique in our vast, checkered and unfortunate history. Unlike any previous conquest, this signified a profound spiritual disturbance, a kind of 'schism in the soul' of India. If we leave aside such invasions as those of Genghis Khan or the Huns, which never succeeded in establishing any stable rule, all conquests of India were, in one sense, religious: that is, they were often anti-Hinduism but never anti-Religion. The latter, a radically new dimension, appears for the first time in our history with our encounter with the West through the British conquest.

Now, the West was by no means irreligious; and, in any case, it is not our intention to argue that the West was not 'really' Christian, or that the British conquest was not motivated by Christianity, though both points are important in many ways. Our main point, however, is that in spite of considerable missionary activity (partly successful too) associated with the rise of the British power in India, the essential impact on the Indian social system was not that of Christianity. This was due not only to the nature of British imperialism, but also to certain important features of Hinduism. (For instance, its combination of a thorough-going dialectic and a transcendent Catholicity). Another characteristic of the British conquest was that it represented the decay of one age and the emergence of another. Thus, the acceptance of the conquest involved the acceptance of a radically different system of ideas: political, economic, legal, ethical and sociological. This again sharply differentiates the British conquest from all the others, which signified no radical

*From *Seminar* (64), December, 1964.

departure from the tradition. (This does not mean that Hindu civilisation is not profoundly different from the Islamic: however, both are traditional, transcendent-centre civilisations: just as the American and the Soviet are both technological industrial civilisations in spite of important differences between them.) A third characteristic of the British conquest was that it was completed at a time when Hinduism was trying to assert itself by throwing out the Islamic rulers of the country. It, therefore, meant a second defeat for Hinduism.

Logically, we should first define the authentic Indian value system and then analyse the processes leading to important changes in it. To carry out this logical plan is, however, a very difficult job. The greatest single difficulty seems to be to arrive at an agreement on what would decide whether a model was authentic. On the one hand, a purely logico-philosophical model of the Indian value system would be open to the charges of being unhistorical and even unrealistic: on the other hand, a historical model, apart from other methodological difficulties, already involves an analysis of a long series of changes and hence one does not know where to begin for a specifically Indian set of values.

The most important single response to the challenges of British rule was, of course, the formation of the Indian National Congress and the struggle for independence largely under its leadership. However, the peculiarities of the British rule gave this struggle a characteristic pattern. Our freedom struggle was progressive from a socio-economic point of view; at the same time, it was revivalistic from a cultural standpoint. The revivalistic strain of our freedom struggle has been usually called a renaissance movement: and this so-called renaissance ('reawakening') has been generally thought to be a natural accompaniment of a freedom movement. However plausible such a view may appear, it is quite incorrect: the 'renaissance' movement introduced a fundamental ambivalence, a basic axiological schism in the ideology of our freedom movement. While the imperatives and urgencies of the freedom struggle contained the corrosive power of this ambivalence, it persists in the post-Independence era with all its sinister power.

The fundamental problems posed for the Indian people by the British conquest may be formulated somewhat as follows:

shall we fight against both: foreign rule and westernisation of Indian values and the socio-cultural system; or, shall we accept the westernisation of our values and way of life and fight only against (British) foreign rule? This challenge was never faced in a straightforward fashion and perhaps could not be during a rigorous freedom struggle. For, very few, if any, could accept foreign rule in principle and, hence, while opposition to the British power was a simple and almost unanimously accepted idea, rejection of westernisation presented a complicated issue. It was clear that westernisation did not necessarily imply foreign rule. Opinion was, therefore, divided on accepting westernisation.

However, during British rule and our struggle against it, the issue could not crystallise, for it had to be recognised that any acceptance of westernisation must strengthen British rule to an appreciable degree, and in consequence weaken our fight against it. Hence, even those who rejected westernisation independently of its affiliation with foreign rule, were not at all clear in their minds. Their problem was twofold: in the first place, they had to recognise that a certain amount of westernisation was necessary in order to be effective in the struggle for Indian Independence. Subjugation to the British rule meant a certain degree of unavoidable westernisation and, under the circumstance, one had to meet the British on their own ground. To remove the national feeling of inferiority and to build up a measure of national confidence and self-respect, one had to accept and promote many aspects of western culture, particularly the educational system—even though this finally worked to undermine one's self-respect.

But, there was a more important difficulty; rejection of westernisation would mean little without a clear idea of what was being preserved and defended. In other words, the problem was to have a clear and coherent idea of the specificity of the Indian value system which was to be revived and preserved against the challenge of the western system. And here it has been extremely difficult to achieve the required clarity of thought. The difficulty essentially lies in the fact that our traditional way of life has a long history, going back to immemorial, prehistoric times during the course of which many streams of thought have arisen, both from within and without: thought-ways that were

conflicting, complementary, parallel, eclectic, eccentric. Besides, archaic Hindu thought is often extremely abstract, symbolic and dialectic; and hence a naturally rich source for diverse interpretations and divergent developments. The serious difficulty of getting an absolutely authentic version of the tradition was clearly recognised as early as the *Mahabharata,* in Yudhistra's answer to the Yaksa's question: What is *dharma*? However, the possibility of knowing the true *dharma* is not denied and the postulate of a single authentic tradition amidst the vast diversity of Hinduism has all along been affirmed, down to the present day.

This fundamental difficulty, whatever its correct solution, was further complicated in modern times by the implicit necessity of solving it in a manner consistent with western rationalistic values which, oddly enough, were passing through a serious crisis in their homeland at about the same time as the beginning of modernism in India. Thus, the urgencies of overthrowing British power in India obscured the absence of any consistent positive content in the idea of *swadeshi* during our pre-Independence days. However, if even today we persist in the fond desire of achieving a synthesis of modernity and Hinduism without a clear or consistent notion of what Hindu culture is, one fundamental reason is the essentially metaphysical nature of the Hindu tradition. We cannot elaborate here on the implications of this characterisation, except to explain briefly that in the sense intended here, metaphysics are necessarily transcendent; they are consistent, but not systematic: and hence a metaphysical tradition, such as Hinduism, is inherently catholic, allowing for an unusually wide scope for diversity; and yet at the same time preserving its orthodoxy at appropriate levels.

By the same token, the basic value system of such a tradition is unchangeable. The only principle of change in the Indian social system is that of application of first principles to contingent circumstances. This clearly means that there are first principles which are universally valid for all time and hence there can be no question of any modification of these. Accordingly, there cannot be any socio-cultural system which denies the first principles. In other words, while a reactivation and reformation of traditional meanings is indicated and is in order from time to

time, a replacement of the first principles by any others is wholly out of order.

Another point which should always be remembered in any discussion of changing values, is that the Indian theory of history is a cyclic one (that is, in so far as this could be true of a trans-historical thought-system). It is understood, therefore, that in the Indian view, all social change, however orthodox, is in the last analysis, a deterioration; regressive rather than progressive—again, in so far as these latter concepts can be meaningful within a cyclic theory of history. This is the background against which we will briefly review some phases of the process of change in the Indian value system following its encounter with the West. The whole process can be seen as developing from two interpenetrating impulses: the need to rationalise Hinduism and the need to modernise the Indian society.

Among the earliest movements was the Brahmo Samaj established in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and later led by Devendra Nath Tagore (1817-1905) and Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84). The latter, however, with his doctrine of *Adesha*, started a split, culminating in the formation of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj typifies clearly a persistent trend of the Hindu response to the western encounter. It endeavours to get back to the Upanishadic sources, but at the same time is rationalistic and humanistic. It has a strong individualistic bias and, although not formally rejecting or eliminating metaphysics, its outlook is essentially philosophical. The Brahmo Samaj was rightly regarded by many orthodox sections as basically heretical. Its founder, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, had, from the traditional point of view, no qualification for the restoration or reform of the tradition. Traditional Hinduism being essentially transcendental and dialectical, goes past and dissolves all kinds of humanisms, rationalisms and individualisms. Hence, any reform or syncretic movement centering in these latter ideas is bound to be essentially anti-traditional. The Brahmo Samaj was motivated by a defensive spirit against the joint forces of Christianity and western rationalism. Hence it tried to absorb what it thought best and valid in both. But incompatibles do not mix.

The truly symbolic figure of the modern age in India is

Paramhamsa Ramakrishna who, however, founded no sect in the strict sense of the term. Nor did he expound any new doctrine or try to carry out any reform or reinterpretation of the Hindu doctrines. His historical significance has been on a different level. One can find in his life a number of departures from orthodoxy, including his experiments with foreign religious forms; but they were overwhelmed, neutralised, by his intense, pure spirituality which was firmly rooted in the tradition, his initiation of Vivekananda and his belief in him as the prophet of Hindu Revival belongs to a different order. That this hope did not come true revealed not so much an error of judgement on the part of the Paramhamsa as the irreversible destiny of Hinduism: the personal success (*siddhi*) of the Paramhamsa and the historical failure of the Swami showed once again that henceforward there could be Hindu saints but no Hindu society: the West had won a final victory against the East.

This was only repeated by the Arya Samaj movement founded by Swami Dayananda in 1875. It too aimed at a revival of original Vedic Hinduism through a radical reinterpretation of the traditional doctrines and a programme of basic social reforms. We cannot attempt here an examination of this doctrinal reinterpretation, but we may indicate how it stands with regard to orthodox tradition. The Arya Samaj believes in the infallibility of the *Vedas*—the social and religious reforms it proposed must, therefore, be simply restorations of the original institutions: return to the true forms. They cannot be innovations, modifications or adaptations. In this, the Arya Samaj, as a socio-historical movement, ran into the inevitable difficulty: Vedic institutions can function only in a Vedic society. But the Arya Samaj not only failed to solve this difficulty, it did not perhaps have a clear appreciation of its fundamental importance.

The Arya Samaj remained a kind of protestant movement within Hinduism, even though its principles required it to be a movement primarily against modernism, of which, however, it was itself a product. It was perfectly right in going back to Vedic inconoclasticism, but an inherently rationalistic strain prevented it from seeing that it was modern western thought which was essentially idolatrous. Its missionary character

itself was basically anti-traditional and can be explained largely as a reaction to Islam and Christianity. The Arya Samaj was eventually a failure. And, once again, it is important to see true character of this failure. Its doctrinal reinterpretation, whatever its validity, was early reduced to being merely an ideological support for its programme of social reform. This surely represented a far-reaching change in the historically-given Hindu values; but these reforms (position of women, their education, abolition of caste on the principle of birth, simplification of daily ritual routine, marriage reforms, widow remarriage, etc., were all required by modern industrial society and eventually did come. On the other hand, in any other field, where the Arya Samaj was not an historical ally of modernism, it did not make any appreciable contribution or achieve any lasting success.

It is in Mahatma Gandhi that we find a clear awareness of the anti-modern character of the traditional Indian values. Mahatma Gandhi was not directly interested in the interpretations of Hindu doctrine as such, even though like Tilak, he also wrote a commentary on the *Gita*. In fact, his main concern was not the revival, revision or modernisation of Hinduism. His chief concern was with man and society and the right conditions for their proper functioning. His struggle for India's freedom from British rule was derived from his fundamental concern. This, it seems to me, is the key to the understanding of Gandhi's role in relation to the Indian value system, for it is here that we find not only his basic kinship with the Hindu tradition, but also some important deviations. (For instance, his undialectical emphasis on non-violence; also the moralistic and humanistic strains in his thought.)

The search for universally valid principles of man's life is a traditional Hindu concern. And, in the true spirit of this tradition, Gandhi did not conceive of this universality in terms of the exclusive validity of any one tradition. Instead, he emphasised the fundamental unity of all traditions. Also, he followed the Hindu tradition in deriving his concern for man and society from a serious concern with his own Self, rather than with man in general. In other words, he is at one with the Hindu tradition in starting (and ending) with autology,

instead of with anthropology. This autological starting-point saves him not only from falling into any fallacious dichotomy or antithesis between the individual and the society, but also from all modern emphasis on the individual or the person. True, Gandhi constantly stressed the point that it is the right kind of men who make the right kind of society; but his life-long struggle to bring about a new Indian society, his never-ending endeavour to perfect techniques of moral resistance and revolt on a group level, his firm belief in the urgent necessity of constructive programmes of societal reconstruction, his relentless demand that the national struggle for political freedom must invariably be accompanied and supported by constructive work for the new society-to-come—all this makes it clear that he did not, for one moment, believe that right living could be at all possible in an evil society.

It is in Gandhi that we find the most uncompromising Indian opponent of modern technological society. This is of crucial importance in the present context: for the core values of the Indian tradition cannot survive in a technology-centred society. Gandhi realised this with unfaltering clarity. This is vastly more important than his attempts to reform and modernise many aspects of the surviving Hindu or hodoxy (his opposition to caste, his views on women, marriage, education, etc.). For, he was not only against the domination of modern technology; he was also, and equally vehemently, opposed to a consumption-centred competitive society. It should not be difficult for anyone to see that if his vision of a village-centred aparigraha-minded society had been realised, or were to be realised, this would be nothing less than the restoration of the traditional values; for in traditional thought there is no room for revivalism, there can be no going back to the past: the tradition can be only renewed through the reaffirmation of first principles, and not through any resuscitation of old institutional forms.

Soon after its independence, India repudiated Gandhi completely and formally. Perhaps it could not have been otherwise—I do not know. However, in repudiating the Gandhian vision, our leaders adopted a set of thought and knowledge which are, and have been, in serious crisis and under unprecedented threats. We could not have better-educated,

more widely aware, more sophisticated leaders. But they made the bargain without adequate realisation of its nature and implications. If clarity is preferable to confusion, let us forget the traditional Indian values and go forward to the values of modern technological society with a clear awareness of the mighty suicidal forces it has generated: forces which are constantly battering this society and its values.

*Modernisation and Religious Values**

A N PANDEYA

An analysis of the relationship between religion and modernisation in India faces several difficulties—conceptual, theoretical, methodological and empirical. Neither of the two crucial concepts, for instance, have been rigorously analysed as to their logical structure, despite their vogue in social science literature as well as everyday parlance.

Let us take up 'modernisation', to begin with. The effort to develop an adequate conceptualisation of the process of 'modernisation' extends to over a century. Karl Marx was probably one of the first to note this process as activated by inter-social communication, when in the preface to *Das Kapital* he observed:

> The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.

This 'showing', one may argue, includes not only the 'images' transmitted to the elites and masses of the less developed countries through the normal channels of international communication and dissemination, but also the relatively sophisticated conceptualisations of 'modernisation', developed by the social scientists of the 'modernised' nations, which have been transmitted to their counterparts in the developing nations. Consequently, conceptualisations of the process which are valid with reference to a specific sequence of historical developments in the West, are uncritically assumed to have universal applicability and significance. Professor S.N. Eisenstadt (1966) provides a good example, when he observes:

*From *Seminar* (128), April 1970.

> Historically, modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic, and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and have then spread to other European countries and in the nineteenth, and twentieth centuries to the South American, Asian, and African continents. (p. 1)

Even when it is noted that the different starting points of the processes of modernisation of these diverse societies have greatly influenced the specific contours of their development and the problems encountered in the course of it, it is claimed that beyond these variations there have developed many 'common' characteristics which constitute perhaps the major core of 'modernisation' of a modern society. It would be worthwhile to analyse these characteristics, for not only do they reveal the implicit value-judgements hidden in the concept of 'modernisation', as Professor Srinivas has noted in his essay, but also what is worse, some kind of a disguised ethnocentricity in definition.

Of the numerous summaries of these core-characteristics of 'modernisation', the following may be cited as an interesting illustration: (1) A degree of self-sustaining growth in the economy—or at least growth sufficient to increase both production and consumption regularly; (2) a measure of public participation in the polity—or at least democratic representation in defining and choosing policy alternatives; (3) a diffusion of secular-rational norms in the culture—understood approximately in Weberian—Parsonian terms; (4) an increment of mobility in society—understood as personal freedom of physical, social, and psychic movement; and (5) a corresponding transformation in the modal personality that equips individuals to function effectively in a social order that operates according to the foregoing characteristics—the personality transformation involving as a minimum an increment of self-things seeking, termed 'striving' by Cantril, and 'need-achievement' by McClelland, and an increment of self-others seeking, termed 'other-direction' by Riesman and 'empathy' by Lerner (Daniel Lerner, 1968). It is noteworthy how, by the trick of utilising the objective mode of statement, a whole series of value-judgements, specific to the socio-cultural system of the theorist, is transformed into a set

of 'indicators' or 'characteristics' in terms of which a universally valid model of 'modernisation' has been erected. Systematic scepticism, supported by unrelenting inquiry, based on self-awareness and environmental context, is probably the only appropriate response, when confronted by such conceptual confusions.

The situation is no better when we turn to the concept of 'religion'. The anthropological study of religion, for instance, has been highly sensitive to changes in the general intellectual and moral climate of the day. Very often, the questions that anthropologists have pursued among religions have arisen from the working—or misworking—of modern western society, and particularly from its restless quest for 'self-discovery', as Clifford Geertz has aptly noted. The thin disguise of the comparative method adopted in most of these religious studies (from Edward Tylor to Claude Levi-Strauss, on the one hand; and Karl Marx to Max Weber, on the other) should not blind us to the far-reaching conditioning to which the supposedly 'neutral' scientific enquiry regarding religion has been invariably subjected. This has serious implications for any appraisal of the 'religious situation' in India, either in its earlier historical phases, or the contemporary setting. Our primary task here is to shed the myths that have been acquired over the last fifty years about the characteristics of our religious tradition and situation, largely as a by-product of the comparative studies undertaken by western sociologists, specifically in the area of the Indian cultural tradition.

The dominant note in this doubtful legacy is the proposition that Asian religion is a major obstacle to modernisation, because it is a bulwark of traditionalism and a repository of beliefs and values incompatible with modern science, technology, and the ideology of progress. The most famous exponent of this view is undoubtedly the German sociologist, Max Weber, who concluded from his learned application of the comparative method to the sociology of world religions that:

> for the various popular religious of Asia, in contrast to ascetic Protestantism, the world remained a great enchanted garden in which the practical way to orient oneself, or to find security in this world or the next, was to revere or coerce

> spirits and seek salvation through ritualistic, idolatrous, or sacramental procedures. No path led from the magical religiosity of the non-intellectual classes of Asia to a rational methodical control of life. Nor did any path lead to that methodical control from the world accommodation of Confucianism, from the world-rejection of Buddhism, from the world-conquest of Islam, or from the messianic expectations and economic pariah law of Judaism. (1964)

This sweeping conclusion is frequently echoed and elaborated in current discussions, without the benefit of his vast erudition or of contemporary empirical studies of the relation of religious beliefs and practices to modernisation. India, one could say, offers a particularly rich field for the study of these interactions and adaptations because of the strength, variety, and long history of its religiosity and because of the intimate and free-flowing connections between the popular religion of the masses and the esoteric religion of the virtuosos. It also happens to be an area where social anthropologists, sociologists and social and cultural historians have begun to identify the underlying processes involved in the 'modernization of religious beliefs', to use an expression borrowed from Milton Singer. This essay is a modest prolegomena to any attempt to clear the ground of the 'Weberian' myths, in so far as they relate to the Indian context today. Inevitably, it confines itself to identifying the relevant questions, rather than providing answers. The more important task is to define the prerequisites of any adequate answer, and suggest some of the more promising leads.

The first steps in this task have already been taken by Professor Srinivas himself. If Weber's primary interest is in religion as a source of the dynamics of social change, and not religion as a reinforcement of the stability of societies (as claimed by one of his most clear-headed interpreters—Talcott Parsons), it is appropriate that one begins a counter-response with Professor Srinivas, who has provided one of the most perceptive interpretations of religion 'as a source of the dynamics of social change' so far as India is concerned. It may be useful, for instance, to begin by tracing the relationship between 'Sanskritisation' and 'modernisation'. 'Sanskritisation', as he sees it, is a process by which the so-called low castes take over from those of the

upper class, the beliefs, ritual, styles of life and certain other cultural items, especially the Brahmins.

How does this process relate to modernisation? Generally, what happens is that when the desire to move up comes to a caste, especially a low caste, it initially takes the form of changing its ritual, style of life, and so forth in the manner of the upper caste, which may be regarded as a prelude to 'Westernisation', however one may interpret this latter phrase. The two are linked processes, and in the situation as it is in India today, you cannot understand one without the other.

Dr. Gould, in a very interesting paper, demonstrated that for the Brahmin and other higher castes, Sanskritisation was an attempt to maintain the distance between them and the lower castes who are Sanskritising; so the Brahmins are, in a sense, running away from the lower groups who are trying to catch up with them. Dr. Milton Singer's studies of leading industrialists in Madras City provides another interesting example of both of these processes occurring in a very large city. These Indians whom he studied might well be described as culturally and socially 'amphibian'. The process itself could be called 'compartmentalisation'. There are, of course, certain limitations to this 'compartmentalisation', since there is a limit to which any personality can divide itself up into all those different compartmentalised roles. There are 'leakages' as a result. Moreover, it is in juxtaposition to a continuity, which is more than a kind of conservative persistence of tradition. As Dr. Singer has noted, it is

> an active, dynamic continuity that consists of people reaching to new conditions and trying to adapt to them. For example, most of these industrialists have tried to reinterpret such basic Hindu doctrines as the belief in rebirth, the belief in personal fate or *karma*, in such a way, that it applies to their industrial careers. To cite one or two examples, one of them said that when he is going to be reborn he would prefer to be an industrialist again, except that instead of taking a B.S. in geology he would prefer to have a B.A. in economics.

Professor Srinivas has convincingly argued that this process of reinterpretation of Hinduism has been going on ever since the

beginning of the nineteenth century. He has identified two trends in nineteenth century Hinduism. On the one hand there is increasing secularisation, illustrated by contracting ritual, of leaving out some and emphasising others, and what may be called 'vicarious ritualisation'—somebody else substituting for me in certain ritual activities. On the other hand, there has been an attempt on the part of the Indian elite to acknowledge some institutions such as *suttee* and human sacrifice as evil, and to put down these activities, and in doing this they have changed Hinduism in the process of reinterpreting it. What has happened today is that we have a purified and reinterpreted form of Hinduism, and this reinterpretation has not come to an end. It is going on.

I should like to dwell on this aspect a little, since it provides the clue to any satisfactory interpretation of the religious situations in India, in the context of modernisation. Perhaps, the most suggestive summary of the situation is provided by Dr. Singer's concluding observations at the end of a panel discussion on the theme, wherein he outlined six propositions:

'1. Continuous exposure to European ideas and criticism from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries stimulated a number of reform movements within Hinduism, such as Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Missions.

'2. Partly in reaction to these European influences and partly deriving from indigenous sources, particular individuals and groups increased their conformity to Hindu beliefs and ritual practices, that is, "Sanskritised" their styles of life. In some cases, this Sanskritisation was a prelude to westernisation and modernisation; in others, it followed upon entry into modern occupations and the acquisition of wealth, political power, and social status as an effort to close the gap between ritual and secular status.

'3. European and modern models and influences have not been immediately fused with traditional models. They have rather been incorporated into Indian life and thought in separate spheres—for example, office and factory—where they have been permitted to develop as "foreign" innovations. Traditional Hinduism, on the other hand, has been maintained in the sphere of the home and social relations. This compartmentalisation has minimised

direct conflict between tradition and modernity.

'4. The conflicts that have emerged from the coexistence of traditional and modern life styles tend to be resolved by abbreviating the time given to ritual observances, by delegating more of the responsibility for ritual observations to those who have the time (for example, women and professional priests), and by reinterpreting traditional religious beliefs such as the doctrines of *karma*, *dharma*, *ahimsa* and *moksha* to apply to the problems and conditions of modern life. Gandhi's use of these doctrines in the struggle for political independence, the abolition of untouchability and the amelioration of poverty is a familiar recent example of this process of re-interpretation of Hindu beliefs. Less dramatic examples can be found among many Hindus engaged in modern occupations and professions.

'5. The net result of these processes of re-interpretations, vicarious ritualisation, Sanskritisation, and compartmentalisation is not yet a secularisation of Hinduism, although the secular ideologies of socialism, communism, and rationalism are also found in India. The net result of these processes of interaction and adaptation is more accurately described as an ecumenical sort of Hinduism that is blurring sect and caste lines.

'6. While these conclusions do not add up to a proof that Hinduism has caused modernisation, they do reveal a capacity of Hinduism to adapt to changing conditions that castes serious doubt on the widespread belief that Hindu beliefs and practices are a major obstacle to modernisation'.

Another sort of evidence, largely empirical, is provided by a number of studies that have been specifically inspired by the Weberian hypothesis. It was probably Robert N. Bellah who first tried to suggest an extended interpretation of the Weberian position when applied to Asia, in his *Reflections on the Protestant Ethic Analogy in Asia* (1963). The first serious attempt to test the hypothesis in the field is represented by Joseph W. Elder's dissertation on *Hinduism and Industrialization* and *Brahmins in the Industrial Setting* (1964-1966), which leads one to cast serious doubts on the validity of Weber's position. Dr. Surjit Sinha's studies in the area should provide further reinforcing evidence questioning the adequacy of Weber's formulations (1969).

The empirical refutation of Weber, however, is a blind game,

unless it is supported by an adequate theoretical and analytical frame, as I have argued elsewhere (1967). This task has implications which overflow purely academic interests, since it ultimately transforms the prevalent set of cognitive orientations in the elite-groups of our community. I have a feeling that the heart of the matter, so far as the Indian religious traditions are concerned, remains untouched, unless one pays careful attention to the 'invisible dimensions' of the religious experience and expression. It is here that analytical energies would be most fruitfully absorbed. Let me elaborate. In contrast to prevalent approaches—evolutionary, psychological and sociological—the newly emerging analysis, which may be loosely called 'semantic studies' of religion seems to be about the most promising beginning for the future, if a more reliable understanding of the religious factor in modernisation is to be achieved. Levi-Strauss has opened up a vast territory for research, with his preliminary explorations characterised by theoretical brilliance and profound scholarship. In fact, he is not alone. Recent works by Evans Pritchard, R. G. Lienhardt, W. E. H. Stanner, Victor W. Turner, Meyer Fortes, Edmund R. Leach, Rodney Needham and Susanne K. Langer tend to show that the analysis of symbolic forms is becoming a major tradition today in the study of religion.

Whaetver else religion does, it does relate

> a view of the ultimate nature of reality to a set of ideas of how man is well advised, ever obligated, to live. Religion tunes human actions to a view of the cosmic order and projects images of cosmic order out to the plane of human existence. In religious belief and practice, a people's style of life is rendered intellectually reasonable; it is shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the world as it 'really' ('fundamentally', 'ultimately') is. (Clifford Geertz, 1968.)

It is in this context that one should link the religious frame with the identity questions. Religion emerges in action systems with respect to two main problems. In order to function effectively, it is essential that a person or group have a relatively condensed and, therefore, highly general definition of its environment and itself. Such a definition of the system and the world to which it is related (in more than a transient sense) is a conception of

identity. Such a conception is particularly necessary in situations of stress and disturbance, because it can provide the most general set of instructions as to how the system is to maintain itself and repair any damage sustained.

In addition to the identity problem, there is the problem of motivation. The problem of identity and unconscious motivation are closely related, for it is just those situations of threat, uncertainty and breakdown, which raise the identity issue, that also arouse deep unconscious feelings of anxiety, hope and fear. An identity conception capable of dealing with such a situation must not only be cognitively adequate but must also be motivationally meaningful. It is precisely the role of religion in action systems to provide such a cognitively and motivationally meaningful identity conception or set of identity symbols.

It is our concluding hypothesis that the Indian religious tradition is a vast reservoir providing the members of a modernising society a wide choice of 'such a cognitively and motivationally meaningful identity conception or set of identity symbols'. This neglected dimension needs to be put in the focal area of future analysis if the role of religion in modernisation is to be grasped in its psychic dynamics, and the distinctive nature of India's modernity is to be intelligently anticipated.

*Caste and Religion in Indian Politics**

CHETAKAR JHA

Politics is a function of several factors: (1) social structure, (2) economy, (3) prevailing movement of opinions or ideologies. Politics, thus, cannot be insulated from the social setting. Politics is concerned with disagreement and conflicts, actual or potential, which arise out of social diversity. It, therefore, has its origin in differences due to social, religious and economic structures. These differences form the bases of groups of persons. There is agreement amongst persons who share a common concern and make up an interest. There is agreement between interests which are complementary to one another over action which they can take and in their opposition to other interests, which have a different objective. The basic quality of politics is, thus, the treatment of disagreements through more or less formalised political institutions and processes. Inequality of opportunity to the members of different groups for access to political power, inequality of incomes, inequality of condition due to geographical differences, diversity of outlook due to differences in social status and prevalence of different religions provide the matrix of social diversity.

Ours is a traditional agrarian society in transition. Its social structure is characterised by an established caste system. The caste structure is one of 'differential stratification' of diffuse impact. At a broader and higher level, the castes are integrated into different religions. There are castes among the Hindus, Muslims, Christians and the Tribes. The caste system is hierarchical. As a result, castes are of unequal social importance. Inequality of incomes and possessions also divides

*From *Seminar* (87), November 1966.

society but the division is vertical. In Indian society, caste and class go together in many cases. Scheduled Castes are generally among the poorest and are at the bottom. Among the Muslims too, the Ansars are not only poor but also very low in the Muslim social hierarchy. These divisions of society have given us stable local groups and there has been and is limited spatial mobility. All this in combination with the predominance of ascriptive, particularistic, diffuse patterns so characteristic of an agrarian society, have determined the nature and shaped the content of State politics in India since the early nineteen twenties. It was then that the politicisation of the Indian people began in a serious manner. Constitutions of municipalities and district boards were largely democratised. Dyarchy was introduced in the provinces. The impact of the social structure came to be felt on politics in several States. The rise of the Justice Party in Madras, and the emergence of casteism as a force in the politics of Bihar in the nineteen twenties are significant. This is also the period when communalism based on religion started gaining strength.

As time passed and people came to be more and more politicised owing to greater democratisation of political and Governmental institutions, communalism and casteism gained still greater strength in politics. The late Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was the President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, admits in his autobiogrophy that

> the P. C. C. (the Provincial Congress Committee) had to take caste labels into account in certain constituencies because success of candidates there depended on such considerations, while selecting Congress Party candidates for election to the Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1937 under the 1935 Act.

He adds, 'further, we (the Provincial Congress Committee) had to give adequate representation to all prominent castes'. The categorisation of some castes as prominent implied the categorisation of some castes as unimportant. The categorisation of castes as important and unimportant was not based on the numerical strength of the castes concerned. Numbers are basic to democracy and members of those castes which were dubbed as unimportant resented the categorisation and generated a

strong element of disagreement and tension. Struggle for positions of top leadership among the persons belonging to different castes of the 'prominent' category generated fierce casteism.

In areas where the Hindus are broadly divided between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, the latter have combined and tried to isolate the Brahmins, but where several important high castes are present, such as in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the resulting political grouping has been different. In Andhra, the struggle for positions of top leadership is being waged by leaders of the non-Brahmins, the Kammas and Reddies. A similar pattern is to be found in Bihar, where the Bhumihars and Rajputs—two rural gentry castes—have been engaged in a deadly struggle for the top positions of leadership. Then there is the fight for power between the Nairs and the Ezhewas in Kerala, between Rajputs and Jats in Rajasthan, between Brahmins and Marathas in Maharashtra. Punjab is refreshingly free of casteism because of the strong Arya Samaj movement and the presence of strong Sikh communalism.

Unlike religious communalism, casteism has been operating through organised political parties. Only a few parties are explicitly organised to represent castes; the Republican Party seeks support among the members of the Scheduled Castes, the D. M. K. in Madras, the Peasants and Workers Party in Maharashtra and the Socialist Party under Dr. Lohia's leadership have been seeking support especially among the non-Brahmin and lower castes. In practice, all parties apply caste arithmetic in distributing and balancing tickets among a variety of castes. Caste is, indeed, there at every step in party groupings: in the nomination of candidates by parties, in the election campaign and ultimately in voting. Every party, and specially the Congress, has various groups inside it. These groups are formed and continue to be based on the main castes in the States. Each caste-group leader within a party wants that the maximum number of party tickets should go to the members of his caste so that his position in the tussle for position in the top leadership would be strong. In the Congress Party this consideration is of great importance. A member's chances of inclusion in the State cabinet and allotment of portfolios is determined generally by the number of members in the Congress Legislature Party who follow him rather than by

considerations of his personal merit and competence.

Then, the parties also keep in view the caste composition of the constituencies and the castes of the contending candidates. Most convinced opponents of casteism (at least in their public professions) coldly calculate the caste-distribution of the voters for the contending candidates. All the parties in the field have been setting up, so far as possible, candidates from that point of view. This, on its face, looks like a method to fight casteism, because personal and other qualities of the candidates would come in for consideration of the voters if more than one candidate came from one and the same caste. But the experience has been otherwise. The candidates are generally chosen on account of their ability to exploit caste feelings more than their rivals. The net result has been an increase in the number of aggressive casteists in State legislatures.

Another consequence is that the Congress in most of the States is today composed of solid groups—groups generally based on castes. Mostly there are two broad groups, each composed of a number of small groups. Each broad group is like a confederation or unstable coalition and the coalition is maintained only while the interests of the groups which coalesce are served. Each broad group has within it one or two major caste groups. Associated with them are stray persons belonging to other castes but they are in the nature of satellites. The broad groups are in the journalistic language known as the Ministerialist and the Dissident.

Caste as a force functions politically. Leaders of a caste are either concerned with the preservation of their privileges or seeking privileges for the members of their castes. The clash between caste groups is there for a share in the 'reality of power'. The anti-Brahmin dominant note in the politics of Madras, Andhra, Mysore and Maharashtra, the rivalry between the Rajputs and the Jats in Rajasthan, the competition between the Nairs and the Ezhawas in Kerala, exhibit a trend of social mobility. Those who have been excluded from enjoying 'reality of power' are today seeking through democratic political processes a monopoly or a share in power. There is nothing very much wrong in the objective, although the methods adopted to secure the objective may appear to be alien to democratic and modern values. That is, the role of the caste is not traditional. Hierarchical

status of a caste is not so important as its numerical strength. Brahmins in Bihar find it politically expedient and convenient to work together with the Scheduled Castes group in opposition to some higher castes. That means that caste consciousness of a different nature is operating in politics. A caste-group is in the nature of a pressure group which seeks to represent the totality of the members of a caste—a primary social organisation functioning in the manner of a secondary organisation.

Religious communalism is another force though of a weaker nature in State politics. Religious minorities are a strong force in Kerala and Punjab. With the bifurcation of Punjab into Punjab and Haryana, there will be two States in India where Hindus will not be in a dominant majority—Muslims in Kashmir and Sikhs in Punjab will be in a majority. Muslims are a substantial minority in Kerala, in West Bengal, in Uttar Pradesh, in Bihar, in Mysore, in Gujarat, in Maharashtra and in Andhra Pradesh. Christians are the largest minority in Kerala and in Madras. After the partition of the country, the Muslim League, the biggest communal party, migrated to Pakistan along with a very large number of their supporters from north Indian States and Maharashtra. The Muslims who remained in India started supporting the Congress in elections. Today, it is only in Kerala that they are formally organised in a political party. In other States, they are functioning as a pressure group and they have changed their political strategy. They felt that they did not receive much importance at the hands of the Congress since their support was taken for granted. So, during the last general elections, a very large number of Muslims did not vote for the Congress candidates. This change in their attitude is aimed at securing greater attention to them and their interests as a minority community. Muslims have started organising themselves in a more formal manner in North India, too.

Sikh communalism in Punjab has succeeded in securing a State for the Punjabi-speaking population which, in effect, means a State for the Sikhs. The success of Sikh communalism has been largely due to the disturbed politics and consequent inherent political instability in Punjab. That is, the success of Sikh communalism is due to the failure of political management by the Congress High Command—the removal of the late Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon who gave stability to Punjab

Congress politics and the virtual imposition then of Ram Kishen as the Chief Minister. Signs of revival of Muslim communalism in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are visible. Acute factional politics in these States has encouraged Muslim communalists. Acceptance of the Muslim League as a political ally in Kerala, even though for a short period, by the Congress has boosted the morale of the Muslim communalists in other States. The rise and growth of the Muslim League in Kerala in recent years is largely a function of political instability and failure of political management on the part of the Congress High Command. The same is true of the Christain Church in Kerala and in the Adivasi areas of Bihar and Orissa. The rise in the electoral support for the Jana Sangh in the Hindi region is a reaction to the supposed soft attitude of the Congress towards the Muslims in India and Pakistan and due to the presence of factionalism within the Congress and consequent deterioration in the performance of public administration.

Religions, like castes, provide their followers with an identity and a set of values which profoundly influence their social attitudes and behaviour. In India, religious and caste distinctions provide bases for political coherence as well as social competition since secondary organisations have not yet properly developed. It is here that traditional traits appear to be holding their own.

Castes and religions are basic social groups, still effective in our social life. There is no getting away from this in India just yet. We need not accept them but we have to recognise, tolerate and treat them in a broad perspective. The immediate job of the political leaders is to forge balanced caste and religious combinations as a method of integrating them. At the same time, still greater attention must be paid to the strategy of economic and social development not merely conceived in the broadest possible scale, but ensuring the implementation of the development plans in the same spirit in which they are generally conceived. The real difficulty lies here and poses a formidable challenge to political leadership: the imperative need is for statesmanship and not leadership in the ordinary sense of the term.

*The Changing Role of Religious Minorities**

RASHEEDUDDIN KHAN

The Muslims in India are in a quandary. They appear lost and out-of-grips with the evolving reality of contemporary Indian political life. And this for many reasons. In terms of the immediate historical antecedents, their major political 'conditioning' is the ever-present memory of their participation in the movement for the formation of a Muslim State in the sub-continent: Pakistan. In terms of the contemporary political situation, their basic problem is how to reconcile their sense of religious and communal belonging with their political identification with the national process of change in India, and thereby play a legitimate, and numerically proportionate, role in consonance with their collective status as the single biggest religious minority in the evolution of a modern, federal and democratic all-India polity. This problem in its essence is not an isolated problem and the peculiar concern only of the Muslim community, but part of the larger political challenge facing India and its national policy of secularism and democracy. Therefore, any solution of lasting value would have to bear the stamp of consensus of all including that of the majority community.

In order to comprehend the peculiar nature of Muslim politics and leadership in India, it might be worthwhile to begin by understanding certain typical aspects of the Muslim mass-psychology which, however irrational and illusory, nevertheless remains subjectively the frame of much of their responses and

*From *Seminar* (106), June 1968. This is a modified part of the paper originally read at the International Round Table, held under the auspices of the International Political Science Association and the Indian Political Science Association, at Bombay, January 1964.

stimulation, of their actions and reactions. Muslim consciousness of superiority, indeed akin to the sentiments of *herrenvolk*, born out of the indelible memory of about 700 years of Muslim hegemony in the Indo-gangetic plains and in many parts of the Deccan, is augmented in its separative aspect by the fact of their tenacious adherence to a faith, non-Indian in its origin and international in its character.

There is a realisation that in democratic India, by the application of the principle of majority rule, the Muslims are condemned, so long as they retain their identity as Muslims, to the unenviable position of a perennial minority. This minority, in its numerical strength[1] is so big as to make it the third biggest Muslim population in the world and, what is more significant, in absolute terms it is an aggregate bigger in number than the populations severally of more than two-thirds of the States in the world. Yet, such a number, in the population-complex of India can never be more than a minority in the national context and, what is worse, due to the dispersal of its people in the various federating States, the Muslim population everywhere has merely a marginal political value and significance. This article attempts to examine certain aspects of this problem a little deeper.

It is well established by facts that Pakistan, paradoxically, was created as a political entity, largely by the direct involvement of those Muslims who were living in provinces and States in pre-partition days in which they were in a minority and, who, by that token, continue to remain in India even after partition, away from their 'dreamland' which they had bequeathed ironically to their co-religionists who had always lived in provinces and States with a Muslim majority (or, at least, a parity with other communities) like the Bengalis, the Punjabis, the Sindhis and the Pathans. What is probably the worst irony of history is the realisation, that they, the real creators of Pakistan and the proponents of the 'two-nation theory' should remain in India, by the exigencies of circumstances, despite their political triumph, only to suffer the consequences of their own logic and face the challenge of secularism and corporate multicommunal growth. Their political logic in pre-partition days ran something as

[1]See the discussion on this point in W. Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, Mentor, New York, pp. 257-63.

follows: Muslims are a separate nation by all canons of recognition, but in a unified India they would be numerically subordinated, politically overruled and culturally overwhelmed by the Hindus, therefore, it is in the interest of the Muslims if India is divided and an exclusive Muslim State for the protection of the Muslims and the propagation of Islam is constituted.[2]

A bulk of the Muslims, who subscribed to this view, then, remained in India more by the compulsions of geography and the strong links of the existing socio-economic relationship, rather than by political choice. Nevertheless, it might not be overlooked that there is another bulk of Muslims, almost equal if not more in number, who were either powerless and bewildered spectators of the zealous 'two-nation' theory exponents; or weak but conscientious and uncompromising opponents, to whom the entire emotive reaction of the Muslim League leadership and its popular acclamation by a large bulk of the Muslim masses was one of the worst nightmares of their political experience. In this latter group were the Muslim 'nationalists', including a section of the Ulema and the enlightened gentry, on whom, consequent upon the formation of Pakistan, had fallen the responsibility of re-educating the Muslim masses to a sense of inter-communal harmony and realistic living in a secular polity. Then, the proclamation of the Indian Republic, in the name of the people, whose liberty, equality and fraternity—irrespective of caste, creed and colour—was enshrined in the Fundamental Rights of the Constitution and protected by an impartial, independent and supreme judiciary, has resulted in a new structuring of power-relationship in India. This has generated a process of secularisation and democratic diffusion. All sections of the people, including the Muslims, are caught up, as it were, in a vortex of change. The challenge is both wide in its magnitude and activistic at all levels. The response from the various sections and groups of the people is unequal, dependent in its commitment and intensity, among other things, on that section's or group's receptivity to change, on its leadership-situation and on the stage of its socio-economic growth.

The Muslim response is further limited by four particularistic considerations:

[2]Ibid., pp. 268-74.

1. Their adherence, as a community, to the traditional view of Muslim polity based on the common law of Islam (Shariat) and its Corps Juris ('Fiqa'), thereby questioning (by inference) the total legitimacy of the legislative competence of the democratic law-making processes in India;

2. Painful awareness of their minority-status and communal-cohesion, thus giving them a psychological reservation in committing themselves to the ideal of total identification to the nation;

3. Fear of 'Hindu' domination, being indicative of their lack of confidence in their creative and contributory role in a competitive polity, thereby making them resist the process of adjustment and integration;

4. Lack of interest- and issue-orientation in their polarisation and in their aggregative functions of politics, thus betraying a lag between their level of modernisation and that of other communities in India.

Islam has a total world view. It is an inclusive religion with its own system of ethics, social norms, administrative directives, laws and institutions.[3] These have emerged from, and are regulated by, the four basic sources of Islamic jurisprudence and doctrinal sanction, namely, *Quran* (the commandments of God), *Sunnat* (based on the *Hadith* or the traditions of the Prophet), *Qiyas* (analogical deduction based on reason), *Ijma* (consensus of the learned).[4] The *Shariat* is taken fundamentally as a doctrine of duties, a code of obligations.[5] It acknowledges five kinds of religious injunctions—*alahkam al khamsa* (*Fard*: obligatory, *Haraam*: forbidden, *Mandub*: preferable *Makruth*: reprehensible and *Jaiz*: permissible). Around the *Shariat* developed the vast body of corpus-juris; *Fiqua*, that is, the law

[3]Donald E. Smith, *India as a Secular State*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1963, pp. 36-41.

[4]See Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*, Government Press, Hyderabad, 1942, pp. 1-12 and Asaf A.A. Fyzee, *An Introduction to the Study of Mahomedan Law*, Oxford University Press, London, 1931, pp. 20-1.

[5]Fyzee, n. 4, pp. 20-1.

proper.[6] *Fiqa* is thus the man-made codified case-law of Islam developed over the centuries, particularly between the first and the tenth century *Hijra* (corresponding to the seventh) century A. D. by the four great *Imams*—Abu Hanifa (80-150 H; A.D. 699-766), Malik Ibn Anas (97-179 H; A. D. 713-795), Shafii (150-204 H; A. D. 767-820) and Ahmed Ibn Hanbal (164-241 H; A. D. 780-855) and later for the next eight centuries by the great jurisconsults or *Muftis* based both on the *taqlid* (imitation) of the four Imams and on *ijtihad* (independent interpretation of law).[7]

In India, from the time of the Khiljis (that is, thirteenth century A. D.) if not earlier, and more particularly and firmly ever since the time of the Moghuls (sixteenth century onwards) and continuously during the ascendancy of the British East India Company (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and even after the establishment of direct British rule (1858-1947), the *Shariat* remained the basis of Muslim personal law in the country. Strange as it will seem, the Muslim civil and criminal law continued to be administered also for all the Indian communities under the Company's protection or possessions till 1772, when, with the promulgation of the famous Regulation II of the East India Company, the Hindus came within the pale of Hindu law, but even then only for civil matters. Muslim Criminal Law remained in force for the generality of Indians till 1862, when after the promulgation of the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, it finally lapsed.

Similarly, the Muslim Law of Evidence also continued to be applied till the implementation of the British Evidence Act of 1872. Since then, however, many Muslim laws are part of the Statute Book, particularly the Muslim law of Inheritance and Succession, wills, gifts, *waqfs* (religious endowments) marriage, divorce, dower, legitimacy and guardianship. These laws are derived from the two well-known texts of Muslim law in India, *Hidaya* and the *Fatawai-Alamgiri* which were compiled and

[6]*Fiqa*: literally intelligence, hence its juristic meaning: interpretative exercise of intelligence. Fyzee, n. pp. 4-22.

[7]Hamidulla, Fyzee n. 3 and H.B. Sharabi, *Governments and Politics of the Middle East in the 20th Century*, Van Nostrand Co., New York 1962, pp. 11-12, citing the authorities of Ibn Taimiya, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina and Farabi on the role of *Ijtihad*.

codified in the time of Aurangzeb, the sixth Moghul Emperor (A.D. 1707). With the decline of the Moghul empire, a general stagnation had set into the Muslim society in India, whose *ulema* and *muftis*, probably as part of the defence-mechanism against the British Raj and later against the fear of Hindu domination, hesitated to develop, modify and adjust in practice the Muslim law. On the contrary, they took an orthodox and *status quo* position. Being mindful of the religious susceptibilities of the Muslims, the British also treated the question of Muslim law as a 'hornet's nest', so that their Lordships of the Privy Council continued to uphold the codified law embodied in the *Hidaya* and *Fatawai Alamgiri* as the only authentic and undeviating *corpus juris* for the Muslims in India, with the result that, as Fyzee points out, new rules of law could not have been deduced by Muslim jurists of eminence.[8]

This position of Muslim law in India in the context of the continuous process of codification and amendments made in the Muslim law, particularly during the last hundred years)—and more so in the immediately preceding half a century in Turkey and Egypt (the two models of modernised Muslim States)—appears most unsatisfactory and stagnant.[9]

Linked closely to the problem of Muslim adherence (emotionally, if not always in practice) to the Shariat, is the question of the determination of a State as Dar-es-Salam or Dar-ul-Harab. In its doctrinal simplicity, all countries according to the traditional Muslims' theological view can be divided into two broad categories.

1. Dar-es-Salam (the land of peace) where the Shariat law operates substantively if not completely, and hence is

[8]Fyzee, n. 4, p. 40.

[9]Cf. Sharabi, n. 7, p. 16, commenting on the causes for the decline of Muslim intellectualism in West Asia (Middle East) says: 'One may say the remaining vitality in Islamic intellectual activity faded in the 18th century with the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the center, defender and guardian of orthodox Islam. Under the Ottomans, *ijtihad*, the "door to independent reasoning" on problems of the Sharia was definitely closed and *taqlid*, reasoning according to established precedents and interpretations, became the basic principle of legal procedure.' See also Donald E. Smith, n. 3, pp. 420-3 and also pp. 30-40.

either a fully Muslim State, or, by inference, a quasi-Muslim State;

2. Dar-ul-Harab (the land of strife) the enemy territory that is the land of antagonistic non-Muslim sovereignty.[10]

But it is instructive to note that this 'duality' was made flexible by the *ulema*, particularly in relation to the determination of the doctrinal status of the British Raj in India.[11] The *ulema* held, to summarise their subtleties of arguments, that the British rule in India could neither be categorised as Dar-es-Salam nor as Dar-ul-Harab, which then would have automatically enjoined on the Muslims the obligations of conducting Jihad (religious war) but as Dar-ul-Aman (a land of basic religious liberties and security) where Aman-i-awwal (primary liberties, i.e., security of person, property and faith) is guaranteed.[12]

The point to be decided by the traditionalist Muslims in India today is whether substantially the same situation as during the British Raj, with regard to their laws, continues or not? If it does, then the Republic of India, is at least a Dar-es-Salam. Even from a doctrinal angle it cannot be argued that with its secular orientation, the modern Indian State is any less a land of 'Aman-i-awwal' than the British Raj in India was with its professedly Christian and imperial character. It is reasonable therefore to maintain that

> India is a country which is neither ruled by the Muslims nor hostile to Islam...(and) the Muslims are still governed by their sacred Shariat.[13]

[10]See W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, Comrade Publishers, Calcutta, 1945, pp. 118-19, wherein he has enlisted the three conditions under which a country can be called Dar-ul-Harab according to the Indian Muslim *Fiqa*.

[11]Ibid., pp. 117-37.

[12]Ibid., p. 132.

[13]Donald E. Smith, n. 3, p. 421. He has cited Prof. Mujeeb's statement: 'Wherever there is a believing Muslim, there is Dar-ul-Islam', p. 423. This however is an idealistic position. Cf. also the hesitation expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru, on the reasons for introducing a uniform civil code in India, p. 290.

The Jamiat-ul-Ulema had given a theological basis for Muslim political participation in the nationalist movement and in secular India by propounding the concept of *mu'aha-dah* (social contract).

> Their thesis is that the Muslims and non-Muslims have entered upon a mutual contract in India...to establish a secular State. The Constitution of India, which the Muslim community's elected representatives unanimously supported and to which they swore allegiance, represents the *mu'ahadah*.[14]

In new India, the fifty-five million Muslims, comprising about ten per cent of the population are faced with a doctrinally new and socially radical situation. It may be stated in the words of a leading Muslim leader, Dr. Zakir Husain. Clinching the basic political challenge facing the community he said:

> In the past the Muslims had been either the rulers or the ruled, today in India they are co-rulers as joint sharers of national sovereignty.[15]

As an analogy it can be said that the problem before Indian Muslims on the national scale is identical to the basic problem of international living itself, namely, that of coexistence *inter se*, on a level of mutuality and reciprocity with other groups and sections of the people, united on the fundamentals of common objectives like democracy, secularism and the pursuit of socio-economic justice. But in effecting this reorientation the Muslims would have to transcend two inter-dependent emotional impediments, namely, their negative awareness of minority-status and their attachment to communal consciousness. Yet, in fairness it is to be realised that both these emotional conditions are based on objective reality. Nevertheless, the task

[14]Smith, n. 1, pp. 285-6.

[15]Sentiments like these had been expressed earlier as well by leaders of eminence like Maulana Azad, Cf. Smith, n. 1, p. 264, also pp. 284-9 and Sisir Gupta, 'Moslems in Indian Politics, 1947–60', *India Quarterly*, New Delhi, 18:4 (October-December 1962), p. 359.

before the Muslims is precisely to transform the negative and disabling aspect of this objective reality into a positive and creative aspect. The survival of the Muslims as a contributory and creative group in the federal Indian polity, would indeed be largely determined by their success in this process of transforming a negative emotion into a positive impulse.

But, let us first understand the problem as it now exists. Numerically the Muslims *vis-à-vis* the Hindus are a minority. Accepting the basic fact of the immobility between religious groups, this situation involving the respective immutable communal equation between the Hindus and the Muslims would continue. Therefore, unless modernisation leads fast to the collapse of traditional cohesion based on caste and creed, the Muslims as an entity would have to reconcile themselves to the position of a perpetual minority. But this situation, even if taken in its static context, need not appear quite so tragic. On the contrary, it might be remembered that 'religious minorities have played a significant role in the evolution of the secular state in the west'.[16] And, further, it is to be realised that in addition to their distinctive cultural contribution, 'religious minorities are the natural guardians of the secular State'. Therefore, the Muslim despair over their minority-status need not be overplayed. First, a minority so big and culturally so impressive like the Muslims in India, with centuries of composite history and composite traditions behind it cannot but be creative and dominant if only its leaders play a positive and uninhibited role. Second, in a secular democracy, itself in a process of modernisation, like India, the operational categories would inevitably change, and with it a new communal culture would relegate to the background the role of communal groups and would supplant it by interest-oriented groups, which, in the nature of things, would have to be multicommunal in their composition, corporate in their demands, composite in their outlook and issue-oriented in their politics.

Now let us examine the implication of what is called communal consciousness. 'The term "community", as used in India,' writes Richard Lambert, 'is one of those conveniently vague words so helpful in the designation of heterogenous social units....The

[16]Donald E. Smith, n. 3, p. 405.

adjectival form "communal" is one of the most negatively weighted terms in the Indian political vocabulary. It is used to describe an organisation that seeks to promote the interests of a section of, the population presumably to the detriment of society as a whole, or in the name of religion or tradition opposes a social change....It is thus an epithet implying anti-social greed and reactionary social outlook....'[17]

It was possibly in this sense that Panikkar said that 'the organisation of Islam in India was therefore, frankly communal (because) the Muslims at all time everywhere have been an integrated community separate from others'.[18] But are not the other minority communities equally if not more integrated 'at all times'? Further, will it be correct to maintain that Muslim communalism is a sort of parallel nationalism or should we hold that it is basically, even if an exaggerated, a form of sub-nationalism, an 'in-group' feeling, a cohesive religious affinity awareness.

Before answering these queries, we have to recapitulate the all-pervading role of religion in India during its long history. It is by now well established by facts that religion, as a sociocultural pattern and as the basis of ethical norms and metaphysical speculations, has been the most powerful single factor in India.[19] Therefore, in such a religion-dominated country, possessing today a plural society, comprising diversified religious, linguistic, ethnic and cultural groupings, it is but natural that homogenous entities consisting of just one religion, language, race or culture would exist based on narrow, yet not ultimately, on divisive loyalties.

Since the majority community is bound to be the first

[17]Richard D. Lambert, 'Hindu Communal Groups in Indian Politics' in Richard L. Park and Irene Tinker, *Leadership and Political Institutions in India*, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1960, p. 211. Cf. Myron Weiner, *Party Politics in India*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1957, p. 164 and Alfred De Grazia, *The Elements of Political Science*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1952, p. 10.

[18]K. M. Panikkar, *The Foundations of New India*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1963 p. 55. Cf. W. Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Minerva Book Shop, Lahore, 1943, p. 185.

[19]Donald E. Smith, n. 3, Ch. VII.

beneficiary of nationalism[20] in a democratic society, therefore the minorities, in order to retain their identity, depend not merely on the promotion of nationalism but also on the simultaneous and contemporaneous development of sub-nationalism. This in the conditions of today in India takes a negative slant and degenerates into communalism.[21] The single biggest reason for it is probably the fact that as a form of primordial cohesion between people belonging to the same religious group, communalism is often a reaction to the fear of domination of the majority community.[22] It was largely this sense of fear that aggravated Muslim consciousness of communalism, which now for almost a century has become a basic factor in Hindu-Muslim politics, making it psychologically difficult for both the communities to discard it.[23] At the base, however, lies the problem that community feeling, as an exclusive and sacrosanct feeling, does militate against the process of total national identification covering the entirety of communities and groups.

The minority status of the Muslims in India became further complicated and powerfully stressed by the communally-oriented section of the majority community as a consequence of the formation of Pakistan. The total number and proportion of the Muslims in the population-complex of India has dwindled and, as a community, their political allegiance has been questioned, their economic and social status has declined, unemployment has spread and generally during the last twenty years, they have lived groping for light. The process of adjustment is made difficult due to many factors. First, there is the community's own lack of confidence in its creative and positive role in a competitive polity. Second, is the resistance offered by sections of the majority

[20]'Hinduism is an ethnic religion, the faith of one particular people rather than an international religion. India is the only home of the Hindus....An Ethnic religion may easily become closely identified with nationalism....The Promotion of national ideals by the state thus tends to become the promotion of religion. This poses a more subtle challenge to the secular state.' Donald E. Smith, n. 3, p. 27.

[21]Cf. A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1954, p. 346. He says that Indian Muslims are neither a nation nor a monolith social stratum.

[22]Lambert, n. 17, p. 219.

[23]Cf. Sisir Gupta, n. 15, p. 346.

community due not only to their fear of the Muslim minority's reassertion for another form of separatism within India, but probably due also to the fact of the severe competition and rivalry generated in all facets of national life by the working of 'the politics of scarcity'.[24]

Then there is in the mind of the common Muslim the long established irrational fear injected by interested parties, that the 'final goal' of Hinduism is assimilation leading up to the annihilation of Islam in India. In this, they are reminded of two sets of historical analogies—the fate of Buddhists and Jains in India who were either persecuted or assimilated within the fold of Brahmanical Hinduism during 1,000 years of encounter, and the fate of their own co-religionists, the Muslims in Spain, who were totally exterminated by the Christians after about 700 years of Moorish-Arab rule; and a similar fate of the Muslims in Greece and in the Danubian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, who were liquidated after the reconquest of these regions by the Christian power.

In reflecting on these analogies, one should keep in mind that analogies generally, and those of history particularly, are to be accepted with great caution and after much scrutiny. There are few enemies of logic more formidable than analogies. The unconscious assumption that, given a similarity of factors, occurrences in history would be largely identical, overlook the vital factors of time, sequence and causality, which changes—and changes sometimes qualitatively—the very framework of circumstances, thus rendering any inference based alone on analogy of history, obsolete and conjectural. What happened to Buddhism and Jainism depended on factors which are not identical to the situation-combine of modern Islam in India. Then, even superficially, the three religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, being based on the Vedas and originating in India, are to be treated apart. The nature of Buddhism and Jainism was historically in the form of a revolt against certain social customs of the Hindus like caste, and against certain vested interests like Brahmanical hegemony. The bigoted phase of Brahmanical revival during the seventh and ninth centuries A. D. has roots clearly in the problems of traditional Indian polity. Therefore,

[24] Myron Weiner, *The Politics of Scarcity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962, p. 10.

this analogy for purposes of Hindu-Muslim relations in contemporary times is thoroughly inept.

Regarding the analogy of the extermination of Muslims from Spain or other parts of Europe, it will be germane to consider the history of the constant militant relationship of Islam and Christianity in the context of the power position obtaining in medieval Europe and the Middle East. The proselytising and missionary character of both Islam and Christianity gave a radically different type of mutuality-pattern to their relationships in history. The non-proselytising and essentially accommodative and secular attitude of Hinduism needs emphasis. As a religion, Hinduism is too amorphous and non-established in its nature to inspire a crusading zeal for any length of time as Christianity, Islam or Hinayana Buddhism are capable of doing even today. In its long history, Hinduism had been free on the 'orthodox and heresy' duality and, therefore, generally also free of the 'inquisition' and 'persecution' mania (except for a brief period during the vigorous Brahminical revival during the Gupta Age).

The major default in proper Muslim response to the demands of change can be attributed to the lack of interest-orientation and issue-specificity in modern Muslim politics in India. This is more glaring in the background of substantial advances made by the majority community. Reasons for this can be traced basically to the lag between the Hindus and the Muslims in terms of the growth of an educated middle-class, the rise of the mercantile and entrepreneur bourgeosie, the spread of Western education and technology, the extent and range of share in the 'benefits' and 'opportunities' provided by new India, and the development of a positive and modernistic frame of ideas.[25] On each of these counts, the Hindus have an edge over the Muslims. In this connection, it is relevant to remember the role of British imperial policy which was based deliberately on widening the gulf between the two major communities and thus driving a wedge in the evolution of a unified Indian national movement. The Muslims were the worst hit by this policy. Linked with this was the failure of the national leadership particularly after the healthy phase of Hindu-Muslim unity, built so spontaneously between 1916–1928 (the Congress-

[25]See Desai, n. 21, p. 347.

Khilafat collaboration for instance) despite the earlier attempts at separation (1905–1911), to push forward the national movement on the solid foundations of communal harmony. The result was that at the time of gaining national Independence in 1947, Hindus and Muslims stood on unequal levels of growth and unequal degrees of modernisation.

Following the formation of a free government in India after the partition of the country, the process of modernisation for the Muslims was checked by three limiting factors:

1. A mass exodus of the well-to-do Muslims to Pakistan took place between 1947–50 thus depriving the community of its middle-class and entrepreneur elite, resulting in the severe depletion of its commercial, bureaucratic and vocational leadership cadre.

2. The unavoidable effects of the 'democratic' legislations like land-reforms, extension of universal franchise and the introduction of the Panchayati Raj resulted, ironically in hitting the Muslims hard. Their landlords—forming a hard-core of those Muslims who remained back in India because as middle-rich they were tied to their lands—were dispossessed by the implementation of the land-reforms; their masses as members of a minority community were inevitably drowned in the pool of universality of suffrage; their earlier privileged position as members of the higher and middle-classes was lost by the introduction of democratic decentralisation.

3. With the operation of the Panchayati Raj and the spread of the community development and national extension schemes, the process of diversification of Indian politics has entered a new phase. A new elite is coming up at the local and slowly even at the State level with roots in the peasantry and in the countryside. This is part of a wider democratic change, long overdue in the rural hinterland. As a result, an army of rural elite has emerged which has challenged urban ascendancy in Indian politics and has threatened, if not partly also dislodged, them from their position of privileges and power monopoly. With this development, those communities whose traditional political base has been urban—like the Muslims—have been relegated to a secondary position. Though it should be immediately juxtaposed here that as an offshoot of this development, the

'less-community-oriented' Muslims grassroot leadership in the rural areas is also emerging as part of a composite multicommunal growth. This new Muslim rural leadership is not so conscious of its Islamic belonging as of its everyday life problems of economy and social reconstruction and of the necessity of corporate participation.

The task before the Muslims then is to transcend the limitations of community-orientation. For this they will have to evolve a form:

(A) of emotional identification and political integration;
(B) of participation and contribution in the process of modernisation; and
(C) of playing the leading role as the exponents of secularism and nationalism.

For the realisation of the first objective it would be necessary to reconcile the needless dichotomy between religion and country. 'To be Muslims' is not antagonistic to 'to being Indian'. It is merely a question of the proper ordering and determination of the spheres of loyalties. A sense of belonging to India, without compromising a sense of adherence to Islam is obviously possible, except if the controversies of modern politics are projected into Islam, or the differences of faiths are confused as the differences of nationalities. As a matter of fact, an Indian Muslim is precisely, in that order, an Indian first and a Muslim next in his sociological, cultural, psychological, and economic and political responses and conditions. Only in terms of faith is he Muslim first and Muslim last, but that is not the concern of the profane problems of politics or the secular aspects of social living. The divergence between him and a member of another community in his region within India is that of degree but not of kind, while the difference between him and his co-religionists elsewhere in the world—say in Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Nigeria or Albania—is essentially a basic difference in kind. Muslim leadership in India ought to stress this point to undo the effect of tendentious propaganda to the contrary.

Political integration does not and ought not to mean cultural integration or cultural subordination. It means closer unity

for political purposes in a heterogenous country and plural society like India. Political integration emphasises corporate development. In this sense alone the call to national integration has a democratic content. Otherwise, if national integration is stretched to domains of culture, faith, language, ideological heritage and matters generally outside political culture and economy, then it might betray an authoritarian pattern of regimentation. Healthy regionalism, autonomy of cultures, free development of languages, liberties of social organisation are the very life-blood of a federal democratic polity. This the majority—communal and political—more than the minorities ought to remember.

Taking advantage of the constitutional possibilities and the establishment of the process of democracy and change, the Muslim leadership at all levels should encourage their co-religionists to discard their separatist tendencies and enter the arena of competitive polity and its composite problems so as to accelerate the pace of modernisation. Even otherwise, this process is going on, through urbanisation, industrial growth, the unfolding of the non-denominational educational system, the spread of trade unions and cooperatives and several other activities of common concern. Faster industrialisation, greater diversification of interest, and more democracy will itself break old relationships based on caste and religious communities.

Minorities with a creative background are bound to play a leading role in the promotion of secularism for the obvious and basic reason of shifting the focus from the religious majority's overlordship. They have also been in history in many countries the torch-bearers of nationalism and change. This is true for instance of the Christian Arabs who, since the middle of the nineteenth century, have been the intellectual pioneers of the Arab nationalist movement. In India, the Muslim elite has a challenge and an opportunity to play this positive role. The active, constructive and non-sectional participation of the Muslims in the diversified fields of changing civilisation in India, would not only give an interest-orientation to their own polities but also a firm stability to the federal polity of new India, in the building of which our generation has a tryst with destiny.

*Framework of Minority Politics**

GOPAL KRISHNA

No plural society has been able to solve entirely satisfactorily the problem of integrating its constituent elements, or even of adjusting their mutual relations in such a way as to safeguard their individual identities while promoting the degree of cohesion necessary for the viability of a composite society. Few societies contain as may pluralities as does our own, and the task of creating social cohesion here is rendered formidable by the legacy of our recent past as well as by the stresses of rapid change. The processes of social, economic and political change that have been at work for over a century have had the dual effect of consolidating the constituent parts while loosening the framework of the composite society.

The communal problem of India in the essentials stems from the fact that the confrontation between Hinduism and Islam resulted in a stalemate. Percival Spear has pointed out that to European travellers visiting India during the Mughal period, the Indian situation appeared comparable to that of the Roman empire in the early years of Christianity: though numerically few at that time, the Christians were destined to convert the Roman empire to the new religion; similarly Islam, especially as it was the religion of the rulers, was considered likely in due course to overwhelm the Hindu majority.[1] The confrontation proved inconclusive and the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of movements seeking the regeneration of Hinduism and of

*From *Seminar* (106), June 1968.

[1]T.G.P. Spear, 'The Position of the Muslims, Before and After Partition', *India and Ceylon, Unity and Diversity*, Philip Mason, (ed.), Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p. 31.

Islam along parallel lines. In the process, the basic issues which have dominated Indian public life since the Mutiny were formulated, even before organised political movements emerged during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The communal movement in India has above all been the movement of Muslims from the Hindu majority areas of the Indian subcontinent. It is not an accident that communal sentiment—fear of the Hindu majority and the search for safeguards, including separate electorates, the reservation of seats and, later, parity in legislative and executive spheres—arose first in North India, and the separatist movement had its principal centres of activity in the Hindu-majority provinces of the north. Historical memories, or rather the popular notions of what happened in history, exercise far greater influence on contemporary outlook and emotions than is generally believed and they have been the basis of the communal politics of modern India.

It was a central thesis of some major Indian Muslim thinkers that India could not be a nation and that the doctrine of nationalism itself was evil because it threatened the unity of the Muslim community which, in theory, transcends territorial and racial divisions. Iqbal opposed the doctrine of territorial nationalism and Maulana Mohammed Ali held that India had to be a 'federation of faiths' rather than a nation-State. While denying the applicability of the idea of nationhood to India, they, and before them Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, rejected the idea of democracy based on equal citizenship; they believed that adult franchise could not be an acceptable political basis for a plural society because of the inevitable threat it would pose to minorities.

The nationalist Muslim leaders, pre-eminent among them, Maulana Azad, believed that territorial nationalism was not in conflict with the idea of the community of the believers and that Muslims could be active partners with members of the other religious communities in the construction and operation of a political system that assured equal citizenship to all. This approach was rejected by the great majority of the Muslim community. (By a twist of history the political, as distinct from religious, opponents of nationalism became the advocates of a separate State for Indian Muslims.) Finally, the efforts of nearly half a century devoted to working out a generally acceptable

system ended in the disaster of partition, above all a disaster for the present Indian Muslim community.

This brief review of recent history is relevant for understanding the present state of the communal problem, for the conflicts which led the Indian leaders to accept partition as a solution remain unresolved. It is clear that the Muslim community has not recovered from the trauma of partition. The more important question, however, is whether there has been a significant change in its view of its place in the emerging nation.

The framework of secular democracy makes Muslims co-citizens, instead of rulers of subjects as in the past. The response of the community to this situation has been hesitant and, in some respects, negative. It is to be seen most sharply in the manner of its participation, or lack of it, in the political process, and especially in the character of the Muslim organisations which have developed since Independence, and the candidates and parties supported by the Muslim electorate over the past sixteen years. The dominant fear of the Muslim community in the post-Independence period has been for the very existence of Islam in India. The sharply defined character of the community and its association with the guilt of partition made it an obvious target for attack from Hindu communalism. Its loss of political power as a result of partition exposed it to possible pressures from political authority. Consequently, the major preoccupation of Muslim leadership has been to sustain Muslims in their faith and to preserve the internal coherence of the community. The same factors have led them also to oppose the reform of Muslim personal law and to seek, increasingly, independent instruments of political action.

Professor W,C. Smith in a perceptive essay on 'The Ulema in Indian Politics'[2] has noted that the Ulema emerge as the custodians of the community when its political power is greatly diminished or totally destroyed. In such situations there is a tendency for Muslims to turn from worldly to religious preoccupations. That something like this has happened to Indian Muslims after Independence seems very likely. The evidence for such a

[2]W.C. Smith, 'The Ulema in Indian Politics', *Politics and Society in India*, C.H. Philips (ed.) George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1963, pp. 39-51.

hypothesis, in the form of the sectarian organisations which have flourished since 1947, is substantial. Here I should mention the two most important among them: the Tablighi Jamaat and the Jamaat-e-Islami. The Tablighi Jamaat, founded in 1941 by Maulana Muhammed Ilyas, characteristically a Maulana from a small town in Muzaffarnagar district in U.P. and belonging to the Deoband school of thought, places its emphasis on fostering religious observances among Muslims. It sends deputations of missionaries from place to place to sustain and strengthen the believers in the practice of their religion through regular recitation of the *Kalmah*, offering Namaz, daily reading of the holy *Quran* and acts of charity. The movement is widespread and draws its following mainly from the lower strata of Muslim society.

The Jamaat-e-Islami, founded by Maulana Maududi, also in 1941, is better known on account of its semi-political activities, its widespread organisation and its many journals through which it propagates its militant sectarianism. The Jamaat believes that religious communities should be separately organised for political purposes and that this is the means to communal harmony; it prefers that Muslims should live as a protected community in a Hindu State rather than that they should be partners in the development of a secular polity. In this, the Jamaat sees both the safety of the Muslim community and its survival as a coherent entity. It is interesting to note that while the Jamaat-e-Islami has flourished over the past two decades, the more nationalistically oriented Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind has declined.

In the immediate post-independence period, the general tendency was for Muslims to withdraw from politics for fear of becoming targets of Hindu hostility. The advice given to Muslims by one of the Ulema in 1950 was to keep away from politics.[8] The Muslim League ceased to operate in the greater part of the Indian Union and the Congress Party emerged as the natural instrument for the participation of Muslims in the new political process by virtue of being the ruling party and also because of its commitment to freedom of religion. Muslim participation in politics has increased over the years, but their political preferences seem to have undergone a profound change. The following table

[8] H.E. Hassnain, *Indian Muslims*, Lalvani Publishing House, Bombay, 1968, p. 35.

shows the number of seats contested by Muslim candidates in four general elections:

Year	Lok Sabha		State Assemblies*	
Year	*No. of Seats contested*	*No. of candidates*	*No. of seats contested*	*No. of candidates*
1952	35	42	416	617
1957	46	61	387	520
1962	83	130	494	743
1967	93	127	552	822

*Excluding Jammu and Kashmir

Among the Muslims elected to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies, those belonging to the Congress constituted the vast majority in the first, second and the third general elections; the pattern has radically changed in the fourth. The table below gives the details.

Number of Muslims Elected on Congress Tickets

Year	*Lok Sabha*	*State Assemblies**
1952	17	142
1957	16	130
1962	17	112
1967	8	57

*Excluding Jammu and Kashmir

Between 1962 and 1967, a very remarkable change had obviously taken place, reflected in a serious decline in the capacity of Congress Muslim nominees to get elected to legislative bodies. Whether this is part of the general decline of the Congress Party's electoral support witnessed in the fourth general election or whether it has lost support, particularly among the Muslim electorate, is hard to say from available data. But the loss of votes by Congress Muslim candidates is undeniable. In the northern States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, which account for more than half the Muslim population in the country, the decline of the support for Congress Muslim candidates is very large indeed as can be seen from the next table.

Votes Received by Congress Muslim Candidates as a Percentage the Total Valid Votes Polled by all Musl'm Candidates in the Elections to the State Legislative Assemblies

State	*1952*	*1957*	*1962*	*1967*
Bihar	63.62	65.01	51.83	39.02
Uttar Pradesh	72.09	57.97	47.27	35.93
West Bengal	56.10	50.63	51.75	47.11
INDIA	57.12	58.62	52.27	40.44

Muslim Candidates Elected to

Parties	*Lok Sabha*	*State Assemblies**
Congress	8	57
CPI & CPI (M)	2	18
PSP & SSP	1	12
Swatantra	3	9
Other parties	—	14
Independents	6	29

*Excluding Jammu and Kashmir

The fourth general election witnessed a greater diversification of electoral support to Muslim candidates according to party affiliation, as is shown in the last table. These results must in part be due to the increasing disenchantment of the politically active Muslims with the Congress Party, an organisational expression of which was found in the formation of the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat at Lucknow in 1964 by Dr. Syed Mahmud, former Union Minister, and representatives of the Muslim League, the Jamiat-ul-Ulema, the Jamaat-e-Islami, and the Tablighi Jamaat. The principal objective of the Mushawarat was to unite Indian Muslims for political action to protect their common interests. It has been alleged that the Mushawarat has been brought under the control of the Jamaat-e-Islami and some substance is lent to this by the reported resignation of Dr. Syed Mahmud from the Presidentship of the organisation on account of differences over the question of extending support to the Congress Party.[4] The extent to which the change in

[4]The Statesman, 22 April 1968.

electoral preferences of Muslims has been caused by the activities of the Mushawarat is hard to determine, but the emergence of Independents as a major category of Muslim politicians, commanding over a quarter of the electoral support secured by all Muslim candidates, is a significant indicator of the shift in the Muslim political outlook in recent years.

The political situation of the Muslim community is extremely delicate because of the nature of the choice placed before it. Its tradition based on an integrated view of politicial, social and personal life, all subsumed under religion, has been to accord legitimacy only to a pronouncedly communal standpoint. Even a Congress MLA from Madras protested in 1964 that.

> under the present system of joint electorate, Hindu society has no opportunity to get to know the real mind of the Muslim community because most of the Muslims whom they have adopted in the secular party have naturally got to be considered as show boys of the majority community. (They are) those who by flattering the powers that be got into good positions to betray both the Hindu and Muslim communities instead of bringing relations closer together.... There is no political party of the Muslim community in this country excepting the Muslim League....[5]

The need to provide the community with acceptable representatives and at the same time to prevent the political fragmentation of the Muslim electorate has led the Jamaat-e-Islami to foster the idea that Muslims must operate as a monolithic entity in the political life of the country. This approach proceeds from the assumption that material safety and political
Muslims can be assured only by building up
and from the fear that if Muslims
choice in the selection of their
themselves to avowedly
would disintegrate. The

and the widespread belief that authority is either biased against the Muslims or is too inefficient to protect their lives and property have won support for this view among some sections of Muslim opinion. But the return to full-scale communal politics which this approach implies rests on a misunderstanding: there is no evidence that a plural outlook in politics will tend to undermine the religious unity of the community. It must also be noted that it presupposes a degree of internal homogeneity which the community clearly does not possess; although far better integrated than the Hindus, it is very diverse in composition, reflecting differences of history, geography and culture.

The aggressive communal spirit characteristic of North Indian Muslim society is not to be found either in the west or in the south of India, nor do the animosities over the language issue which have excited passions in North India since the 1870s find their echoes in those parts of the country where Urdu is not the common language of the Muslim population. The processes of social and economic change are tending to make the community, like other similarly placed groups, more differentiated than ever before and it is to be expected that the political choices made by individual Muslims would, in the absence of pressure for solidarity, reflect the increasing social differentiation within the community.

The active controversies dominating current debate on the Muslim situation show how seriously issues such as the role of religion in public and personal life or the character of the associations permissible for a Muslim in a non-Muslim State are being pondered over by the community. Because of their particular situation—a relatively backward defensive minority—
ablighi Ja ims are slow to experience the retreat of religion to
as to unite Indian d its abdication as a factor determining
ommon interests. It has e processes have occurred in other
as been brought under the co on of their political outlook is being
me substance is lent to this by wth of Hindu communalism.
Dr. Syed Mahmud from the Presiden is likely to hasten such an
n account of differences over the questio the opposite direction.
the Congress Party.[4] The extent to wh